January 2022

Sisters Of Social Justice: The Social Justice Activism Of The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters

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SISTERS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISM OF THE GRAND RAPIDS DOMINICAN SISTERS

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

Of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2022

MAJOR: HISTORY

Approved by:

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Advisor Date

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DEDICATION

For my grandchildren, Marcus, Micah, Eliana, Theo, and Francis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Faue. Without a doubt, I would not have finished this dissertation without her vast knowledge, support, and patience. I am not sure how many doctoral students can claim to have the chair of a university department lead one's dissertation committee, but I count myself as lucky for having her in that capacity. Dr. Faue's willingness to walk alongside me through difficult days and help me cross "the finish line" reflects the measure of her support and kindness. She, and her partner Carol, welcomed me into their home on many occasions. I will forever be grateful for Dr. Faue's help, and for Carol's kindness and excellent cooking. Trekking across the state to visit Dr. Faue, Carol, and Jack, their clever feline, was never a burden and was always looked upon as a special day.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee, "my team,": Dr. Betsy Lublin, Dr. Janine Lanza, and Dr. Amy Dunham-Strand, who provided invaluable insight and guidance into my research and made this dissertation all the better. Their combined ideas helped me look at my research, and the Sisters, in ways in which I had not, making this dissertation all the better. Amy, I am also very fortunate to call you a colleague. I am blessed to work alongside you.

I could not have finished this dissertation without the support of special friends. Dr. Maria Wendeln, brought me much laughter and joy every day as we talked about our families, work, and world events. I could not have made it through the pandemic and the other national crises over the last five years without your friendship. Thank you, Julia Poole, for our monthly lunches and treks to Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C., over the years. Your "get it done" pep talks and notes of encouragement were always perfectly timed and always appreciated.

I am thankful for my family for all their encouragement and support from my family: Nick, my amazing daughter, Rebekah, and her husband, Ben, for their love and support. Ben's help in

formatting my dissertation relieved a great deal of stress and I am thankful for his assistance. My wonderful daughter, Isabella, welcomed me into her Colorado home on many occasions when I needed a break or a quiet place to write. I would especially like to thank my grandchildren for whom this dissertation is dedicated. Marcus, Micah, Elie, Francis, and Theo, you bring great joy and laughter to my life. This world is a much better place because of you. I am so proud to be your grandma.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters who so graciously allowed me into their convent, their home, to learn more about their lives and social justice activism. Each Sister deserves a special thank you for answering my unending questions and their willingness to share with me so many aspects of their ministries. A very special thanks, however, must go to Sister Mary Navarre, O.P., and her fellow archivist, Jenifer Morris, for their help in tracking down dozens of primary sources. Not only do I appreciate all the work that you have done to help me bring this project to fruition, but also the friendship we developed along the way and the laughs and wonderful conversations we always shared. Sister Navarre, you are always welcome at my home to spend time with Henry the horse, and Betsy the donkey.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> *As vowed women religious and as a Congregation, it is the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching that has called the Dominican Sisters~Grand Rapids to bear witness to the dignity of every human person.*[1]
>
> *Today Religious, especially women, are much more aware of their right to legitimate autonomy . . . and are more inclined to question assumptions of arbitrary power.*[2]

Entering the Dominican Center at Marywood in Grand Rapids, Michigan, one can see objects typically belonging to a Catholic convent: crucifixes and religious prints and paintings, rooms set aside for quiet prayer and contemplation, and a small bookstore stocked with psalters, books on Catholic theology and Catholic saints, and colorful displays of beaded rosaries. A line of photographs, dating from the mid-twentieth century to the present, graces a wall near the bookstore. The photographs chronicle the history of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters during the past seventy-five years. While the longer history of the order dates to the establishment of a cloistered Dominican order for women in France in 1206, these modern pictures range from habit-clad sisters teaching small children in the 1940s and 1950s to more recent images of Women Religious working at a food distribution center in a local church.[3] A closer look at these photographs reveals, however, an image of Catholic Sisters that stands against the traditional assumptions of Women Religious in the United States.[4] Rather than the conventional ministries

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[1] "Justice is a Ministry of the Dominican Sisters~Grand Rapids," July 25, 2019 *http://www.grdominicans.org/justice-is-a-ministry-of-the-dominican-sistersgrand-rapids.*

[2] Sandra M. Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (Mahwah, NJ.: Paulist Press, 2013).

[3] Mona Schwind O.P., *Period Pieces: An Account of the Grand Rapids Dominicans, 1853-1966* (Grand Rapids: Sisters of the Order of St. Dominic, 1991), 8-10.

[4] I use the terms, Sisters, Nuns, and Women Religious, as proper nouns, as the Marywood Sisters do in their own writing. Generally, the term, "Nun," refers to women religious who are contemplative and live cloistered or semi-cloistered, lives in convents. "Sisters," on the other hand, refers to women religious who live apostolic lives, often ministering to people outside of their communities and may live away from the motherhouse of their community. I use the terms, "Sister" and "Women Religious" (a more modern term), interchangeably. The choice of using the term,

associated with teaching and nursing, these pictures reflect the radical social justice activism on the part of Catholic Women Religious.[5]

Several photographs are striking for the notable histories behind them. For example, one is of a line of almost a dozen Women Religious standing shoulder to shoulder on the campus of Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Sisters, wearing the traditional Dominican traveling garb of black capes and black veils, along with the standard boxed wimple, wear somber expressions. The Sisters, who were faculty and staff members of Aquinas College, were preparing to march in a civil rights rally in downtown Grand Rapids in the mid-1960s. While the city of Grand Rapids has not been known for its anti-racism activism in the Civil Rights movement, neither were the majority of Catholic Women Religious.[6]

"Women Religious" rather than "nun," also reflects the purposeful change that Sisters made during Renewal after the Second Wave Feminist Movement and the Second Wave Feminist Movement to reject terms, such as "daughters," "children," "brides of Christ," which reflected the ways in which the Church and the public viewed Women Religious as more child-like than adult and having little to no autonomy. See, Lora Ann Quiñez, CDP, and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDeN, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 88. Recent work, however, has challenged the sharp dichotomy between contemplative and apostolic life, as studies of sixteenth-century cloistered mystics saw the cloister as a "missionary vocation." See Laurence Lux-Sterrit and Carmen M. Mangion, ed., *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200-1900* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

[5] I define radical acts of social justice as acts of civil disobedience that may lead to a Sister's arrest and imprisonment and or endangerment. In the context of Women Religious' supposed inappropriate behavior, I describe that as behavior and actions that were seen by some members of society and the Catholic Church, as stepping outside mid-twentieth-century conservative ideas of womanhood: passive, non-confrontational, and devoted to the domestic realm. For Women Religious in the United States, this meant their ministries were teaching and caring for children, the sick, and the elderly. It also meant following the strict behavioral guidelines established by the Catholic Church: obedience, chastity, poverty, and piety. These ideas were radically changed after the Second Vatican Council and the Second Wave Feminist movement as Women Religious' ideas about identity and their missions changed radically.

[6] New research on what historian Amy L. Koehlinger calls the "racial apostolate" documents the civil rights activism of Catholic Women Religious beyond the few Catholic nuns made famous by their participation in the March 1965 march on Selma, Alabama, alongside Martin Luther King Jr. See especially, Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). Little research has been conducted on civil rights activity in Grand Rapids. There are, however, two fine works documenting the activism of African Americans in the Grand Rapids: Randal Maurice Jelks, *African Americans in the Furniture City: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Grand Rapids* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006; Todd E. Robinson, *A City Within a City: The Black Freedom Struggle in Grand Rapids, Michigan* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013.

Fig. 1.1. Marywood Sisters preparing to march at a Grand Rapids Civil Rights rally. Cir. 1963.[7]

The most striking photograph in this series is arguably a photo of a police officer standing in front of a red-stained cement wall. If one walked past this photo quickly without examining it closely, they would assume the officer is simply directing traffic—human or automobile. A closer look reveals that the red stain is blood that had been tossed on the wall of the Pentagon during a political protest of America's involvement in the Gulf War. The police officer in the front of the photo is guiding traffic away from other officers who are arresting demonstrators. Three more policemen, standing behind the first officer, are in the process of handcuffing Grand Rapids Dominican Sister, Carol Gilbert. She and Grand Rapids Dominican Sister Ardeth Platte were arrested and received unsupervised probation as their sentence for this particular social justice action. This was just one instance of the many times Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters were arrested

[7] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.

Fig. 1.2. Grand Rapids Dominican Sister Carol Gilbert, O.P., being arrested in front of the Pentagon for protesting the Iraq War. Cir. early 2000's.[8]

for their activism against United States' involvement in wars and the country's arsenal of nuclear weapons.[9]

While the photographs in this chapter chronicle just a few examples of Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' social justice activism, they suggest a larger truth about the ways in which Catholic Women Religious are generally perceived, not only by society in general, but by historians of American history, American women's history, and American religious history. Largely ignored by historians or instead, seen as passive religious women constrained by church patriarchy, the history of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters and their social justice activism suggests that while they were often opposed for their activism, and may have felt constrained by that opposition, the Sisters were determined to engage in actions, sometimes radical, on behalf of

[8] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[9] Acts of civil disobedience that resulted in arrests and prison sentences were usually committed on behalf of the anti-nuclear weapons and manufacturing and anti-war movements, civil rights, farmworker rights, and on behalf of other marginalized groups. Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 240.

social justice and often at great cost to individual Sisters and the Congregation.[10] Their past and present activism brought Women Religious squarely into the political, economic, and social crises of the late 20th and early 21st centuries even as the male hierarchy of the Catholic Church and other institutions chastised the order's mission of social justice in the community, nation, and even the world. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters I have examined within this dissertation are exemplars of the congregation's activities, mission, and consequences of acting in the world with one's faith within the constraints of the external world and the world of the Catholic Church.

"Sisters of Social Justice: The Social Justice Activism of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters," examines the late-twentieth-century social justice activism of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at the local, national, and international levels. It addresses the opposition to their social justice activism by the Vatican and other institutions at the local and national levels and the dangers they faced when ministering abroad. It argues that within the opposition and dangers they faced, and their responses to these challenges, we can see the agency of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters.

This dissertation, "Sisters of Social Justice: The Social Justice Activism of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters," will add to the growing body of research that addresses the invisibility of Women Religious in the historical literature and dispels commonly held misconceptions regarding their work, doctrine, and activism. It demonstrates that Catholic Women Religious were important historical markers of agency at local, national, and international levels. As the Sisters attempted to work on behalf of the poor and downtrodden, they often faced the opposition of powerful forces from within the Church and society that attempted to hinder their work.[11] While

[10] As this dissertation will demonstrate, some Sisters often paid a heavy price for their social justice activism. They were sued by their neighbors, caught up in natural disasters, military coups, kidnapped, arrested, and sent to prison.
[11] The "forces" examined in this dissertation include church clerics including top officials of the Vatican, a powerful neighborhood association, media, the federal government, authoritarian regimes and militaries. The Sisters were also

it is common knowledge that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has long worked to assert control over Women Religious, there were other institutions that worked to curtail and reshape the Sisters' activism. It is within these struggles that we can locate the Sisters' agency, one rooted in the changes to religious life prior to the Second Vatican Council, the reforming encyclicals of the Second Vatican Council, Catholic Social Teaching, and after the Second Wave Feminist movement emerged, feminism. Their agency was, and is, rooted in the long history of the Grand Rapids congregation having to navigate the patriarchal structures of the Catholic Church.

Focusing on the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters and their social justice activism as a case study of Women Religious in this period has several advantages. Choosing the Grand Rapids Dominicans Sisters provides findings that go beyond local significance for several reasons. First, being a progressive community in its activism and outlook, Grand Rapids Dominican Women Religious are similar to many Women's Religious orders throughout the country. While each religious community has its own unique histories and charisms (spiritual gifts), they all proclaim their love and devotion to the Gospels and the church, and to their commitment to advocate for a more just world. Second, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters have followed the familiar trajectory of post-Vatican II renewal that many communities of women experienced: they broadly expanded their social justice activism; they saw a dramatic drop in the numbers of members, and they radically changed the ideas of what it meant to be Catholic Religious Women. Third, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters have made an important impact on a number of social issues located not only at the local level but also at the national and international level, with a few of the Sisters gaining international attention for their activism.

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confronted with deadly natural disasters which thwarted their work and engendered struggles between individual sisters and the congregation's leadership team.

This dissertation begins by discussing the origins of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' social justice activism and the impact that activism had on their lives, their communities, the church, and the public. Their social justice activism took place on local, national, and international levels as they began to apply the lessons of Vatican II and the ideas of liberation theology to their religious mission. The dissertation then explores three case studies of their activism. It begins on the local level as chapter two examines the ways in which the Sisters attempted to establish a rehabilitation home for former prostitutes and their children in Grand Rapids. Moving to the national level, chapter three explores the activism of Sisters Ardeth Platte, Carol Gilbert, and Jackie Hudson's, anti-nuclear weapons and anti-war protests at various locations throughout the United States; and chapter four examines the Sisters' international work in three Latin American countries—Peru, Honduras, and Guatemala. The common thread that connects these campaigns is the connection the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters—and other Catholic Women Religious orders—saw between their faith on the one hand and their mission to apply the principles of that faith to their work in the world.

Brief History of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood

Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters draw on over eight-hundred years of history as a source of identity and strength and as a community of women committed to the Gospels and to social justice. The Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, formerly known as the Dominican Congregation of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, are presently a congregation of the Dominican Third Order.[12] As of November 2018, they have less than two hundred members in their community, far fewer than

[12] There are three Dominican orders. First orders are the ordained, meaning only men can gain this standing. Second orders are those that live contemplative and largely cloistered lives. Third orders are religious who have taken vows, but their ministries take them into the public realm. After the Dominican Sisters were forced to leave their cloister to become teachers in the early nineteenth century in Germany, their status changed from third order to second order.

the 950 Sisters in their order at their high mark in 1966.[13] Prior to the Second Vatican Council, held from 1962 to 1965, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, like the majority of Catholic Women Religious, worked as teachers and nurses in Catholic institutions. The vast network of Catholic schools, hospitals, orphanages, and colleges, created in the twentieth century is largely due to the work of Catholic Sisters.[14]

The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' history begins with the establishment of cloistered nuns of the Dominican Second Order by Dominic De Guzman in 1206, in Prouille, France. [15] In 1233, a Dominican cloistered convent, Holy Cross Monastery, was established in Ratisbon (known today as Regensburg), Bavaria.[16] In the Napoleonic era, German monasteries that had survived the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth-century faced secularizing forces. In 1803 a local bishop ordered the cloistered nuns in Ratisbon to teach young girls in exchange for the right to remain a religious community. Despite being a Second order mendicant community accustomed to being cloistered, the nuns left the cloister and embarked on instructing young girls. They thus began a career of teaching that lasted over 200 years.[17] In 1853, four choir nuns and two lay nuns made their way from Germany to New York City in response to the need for teachers for the children of

[13] At their height in 1966, Grand Rapids Dominican Women Religious boasted almost 900 members in their community. See Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 384.

[14] For Catholic Sisters' work in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Chicago, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[15]Margaret McGuinnes, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 36, 37. Schwind, 8-10.

[16] Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 8.

[17] Marywood Sisters continue the long tradition in working in the education field to this day. Their dedication to this tradition and is reflected in the many Sisters who have extensive degrees, including a large number of Sisters who have earned Ph.D.'s in order to teach at the higher education level. For example, Sr. Barbara Reid, O.P., Ph.D., is a professor of New Testament Studies and the President of Catholic Theological Union, https://ctu.edu/faculty/barbara-reid/#1505148396471-1caa0b9a-1b8e3164-42b9; Sister Justine Kane, O.P., Ph.D., is a professor in the Education Department at Aquinas College, https://www.aquinas.edu/people/justine-kane-op-phd-81. Sister Barbara Hansen, O.P., PhD., now retired from teaching, taught chemistry at Aquinas college, https://www.grdominicans.org/jubilarian-shares-story-sr-barbara-hansen-op/; Sister Mary Navarre, O.P., has a PhD. in education and after retiring from teaching, she is now the archivist for the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.

German immigrants.[18] Their New York monastery grew to such a size that they were able to teach the parish schools of the Dioceses of Brooklyn and New York well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[19]

In 1877, Detroit's bishop sent word to the New York convent that he was in need of teaching Sisters for his Diocese which at that time included northern Michigan and the east side of the state. In response, six Dominican nuns left New York City and arrived in Traverse City, Michigan on Thursday, October 23, 1877. They began teaching the following Monday. Barely surviving their first winter in northern Michigan, the Dominican Sisters branched out from Traverse City. By the end of the century, they staffed more than a dozen parish schools. At Pashabetown, near Grand Traverse peninsula, Dominican sisters taught indigenous students, as they did at the Chippewa reservation in Mt. Pleasant. By this time, they already had established themselves as capable teachers and nurses.[20]

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[18] Generally speaking, "choir nuns," refers to upper-class and educated women religious whose family paid a very large dowry to enable young woman to enter a convent. A "lay nun" usually refers to a woman from a poor background who was uneducated and unable to pay a dowry to enter a convent and did not take the same vows as choir nuns. Lay nuns basically served as servants to the choir nuns and to the convent in which they lived. This medieval class structure was eventually abandoned in the United States as most American women had no patrons or wealthy families to provide an expensive dowry. See Margaret Susan Thompson, "History of Women Religious in the United States" Audio CDs. Now You Know Media, 2009.

[19] Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 8-10.

[20] After the discovery of Indigenous children's buried bodies at residential schools in Canada in the summer of 2021, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (an association of the leaders of Catholic Women's Convents), of which the Marywood Sisters are a member, issued an apology for their role in the abuse of indigenous children. They released a statement, reading, in part: "Compelled by our faith, reading of the signs of the times, and in the spirit of our call as religious," they will continue to "learn about the history of colonization on this continent," and "conduct research on each congregation's involvement with Indian boarding schools," and "in processes of reflection and repentance, develop and adopt official statements of acknowledgment and apology," and "take appropriate actions to make amends." "Resolution to Action: Native American Boarding Schools," Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Summer 2021. https://lcwr.org/social-justice/assembly-resolutions/doctrine-of-discovery; https://lcwr.org/resources/publications/native-american-boarding-schools; Dan Stockman, "LCWR Assembly Opens with 'a Profound Apology' for the Perduring Sin of Racism," *Global Sisters Report: A Project of National Catholic Reporter,* August 12, 2121. https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/news/news/lcwr-assembly-opens-profound-apology-perduring-sin-racism. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters have released a Land Acknowledgement statement to "name the Native peoples who through political structures, war, or other exploitation suffered hardship and were made to be invisible." The statement also recognizes that the land the Sisters occupy was the ancestral home of the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Bodewadmi tribal people. "Marywood Land Acknowledgement-Ancestral Home of Odawa, Ojibwe, Bodewadmin (Potawatomi) Peoples, https://www.grdominicans.org/dominican-sistersgrand-rapids-marywood-land-acknowledgement/.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the relationship between the Michigan congregation and the New York Motherhouse became more complicated, in large part due to the distance between the Motherhouse and the Sisters in Michigan. As their missions grew in Michigan, it became more and more difficult to communicate with the Motherhouse. The bishop, out of canonical and practical concerns, began to press for the Michigan Sisters to separate from the New York Motherhouse.[21] Separation was a common phenomenon throughout the United States in this era as satellite convents cut formal ties with their original Mother Houses largely due to logistics. The formal separation between the Dominican Sisters in Michigan and the New York Community occurred in 1892. From the first Dominican Sisters sent from New York to Michigan, to the last Sisters sent in 1894, approximately one hundred women made the difficult trek west to staff Michigan's Catholic schools.[22]

In 1888, Bishop Henry Richter of the newly established Diocese of Grand Rapids requested teaching sisters from the Dominican Sisters in Traverse City not only to meet the needs of parochial schools in his diocese but also to administer a newly built orphanage in Grand Rapids, St. John's Home. The first Sisters arrived in Grand Rapids in 1889.[23] In Grand Rapids, the Sisters continued their traditional ministries of teaching and nursing. In 1927 they acquired land in New Mexico and built a hospital to serve the needs of the poor. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the Sisters' teaching ministries grew throughout the state of Michigan and they staffed and managed Aquinas College, which began as a novitiate school in 1866 in Traverse City before it was transferred to Grand

[21] It was common in this era for satellite congregations to separate from the original motherhouse. Often separated by hundreds, if not thousands of miles from the Motherhouse, with only letter-writing as the means of communication, which could take weeks or months for a letter to arrive with instructions or other important information, many congregations split from the Motherhouse and established independent congregations; Schwind, 49. For governance structure within the Catholic Church, see "Code of Canon Law, Book I. General Norms, Title VII. The Power of Governance (Cannon 129-144), https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib1-cann129-144_en.html;
[22] Ibid, 25-36, 44.
[23] Ibid, 37.

Rapids in 1911. By 1931 the college serviced young men and women as a junior college. In 1940, it was expanded to a four-year bachelor's degree program.[24]

By the1960s, the congregation had nearly 900 vowed women living in Grand Rapids on their large campus or scattered throughout the state of Michigan at Catholic parishes. The majority of the women who entered religious life came from strong Catholic families living throughout the state of Michigan. They attended Catholic elementary and high schools, often being taught by Dominican Sisters. This was a major draw for Marywood. Young women often entered the novitiate immediately after high school, although there were some occasions when sixteen- and seventeen-year-old girls entered. Women who entered religious life in their early twenties were considered "delayed vocations" that is, having entered religious life after the traditional age of eighteen or nineteen.[25]

By the opening of the Second Vatican Council, in 1962, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters were staffing dozens of parish schools throughout the state. They also sent missionary Sisters to Central America as teachers and nurses. After the Second Vatican Council, their lives and ministries radically changed. The renewed mission of the church took them out of the convent and brought the Sisters squarely into the public realm as they addressed injustices ranging from poverty and racism to prostitution and domestic abuse, the possession of nuclear weapons, wars, and environmental concerns. As the Sisters' social justice consciousnesses grew in the late twentieth century, shifting from teaching children to addressing deep structural barriers that prevented people from overcoming poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other social issues, the Sisters adjusted their ministries accordingly, creating programs to address these issues, or

[24] "History of Aquinas College," https://www.aquinas.edu/history-aquinas-college.
[25] Entering a religious order immediately following high school was common for Catholic women throughout the United States, especially before career opportunities expanded for women after the 1960s. McGuinness, *Called to Serve,* 156; Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 323-325.

supporting programs that addressed them.[26] Despite the Sisters' efforts to help the most marginalized segments of society and to address deep societal injustices, their social justice activism often provoked criticism for the issues they sought to remedy but also because they stepped out of commonly perceived roles as Women Religious.[27]

The Second Vatican Council is commonly understood to be the genesis of the radical changes to Catholic Sisters' lives and their social justice activism.[28] It is true that the Council had a major impact on Women Religious and their activism. In fact, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, as with other Religious orders, locate the genesis of these changes and their activism prior to the Second Vatican Council. They note that "the ground for renewal had been well prepared," prior to the Council.[29] The Liturgical Movement of the late 1920s and 1930s, Cardinal Leo Joseph Suenens's pathbreaking book, *The Nun in the World: Religious and the Apostolate,* in 1963*,* and the foresight of two Prioresses, Mother Victor Flannery, and Sister Aquinas Weber, "set the stage for the intense communal study that began the renewal of the Congregation."[30]

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[26] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 237-258.

[27] See especially Ann Carey who criticizes Catholic Women Religious for modernizing their religious lives and missions. Ann Carey, *Sisters in Crisis: The Tragic Unraveling of Women's Religious Communities* (Huntington, IN.: Our Sunday Visitor Publishers, 1997).

[28] These perceptions can be attributed to Sisters' insulated lives and the insulated nature of the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council and the focus by the media on the Second Vatican Council's liberalizing documents and not on Sisters' lives before Vatican II. See Colleen McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Rosa Bruno-Jofré et al., *Vatican II and Beyond: The Changing Mission and Identity of Canadian Women Religious* (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 3-16; Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Lora Ann Quiñonez, and Mary Daniel Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[29] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 57.

[30] Ibid. For changes to Women's Religious lives prior to the Second Vatican Council see Quiñonez and Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters;* McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America.* The Social Gospel, especially Social Gospel proponents, Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, may have had some influence in the ways Catholics saw their role in American society in the early twentieth century. Catholic historian, John Pinheiro, however, states that while there was some cross-over of ideas because Protestants and Christians had the same intellectual origin and both groups were responding to the social and cultural consequences of nineteenth-century industrialization, Catholics did not address the material well-being of society in the ways Protestants did until after the Second Vatican II. Interview with author, November 20, 2021; see also John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom,* (New York: Norton, 2003). According to Marywood Sisters, Mother Flannery and Sister Weber were not charismatic leaders, per se, but they provided steady leadership during the critical years of the Second Vatican

In the late 1920s the Dominican Sisters incorporated elements of the Liturgical Movement into their worship, educational programs, and religious lives. The movement, a nineteenth century European initiative to reform Catholic worship, was brought to the United States by Benedictine priest, Virgil Michel, who saw an inherent "link between the liturgy of the Church and action for social justice."[31] Based at St. John's Abbey, in Collegeville, Minnesota, Michel wrote in 1937, "so while many Catholic Christians mind their own businesses, the injustices suffered by share-croppers, the gross discrimination against Negroes (even at times within the walls of the Catholic churches), economic oppression of all sorts, crying court injustices, violent vigilante antics based on the principle that might is right, etc., go on with hardly a prominent Catholic voice raised in protest."[32] In other words, he "believed that a deeper understanding of the liturgy would in turn . . . bring about a more just society."[33]

In 1929, Marywood Sisters, Jane Marie Murray, and Estelle Hackett, began a working relationship with Virgil Michel, who not only came to Grand Rapids to provide instructions on the Liturgical Movement for the entire congregation but also encouraged the Sisters to write an educational series of textbooks for children that imbued the movement's precepts. The result of

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Council. One Sister described the two leaders as being "able captains steering a ship during a storm." Sister Mary Navarre, interview with author, November 30, 2021.

[31] Lucinda A. Nolan, "Virgil Michael," Talbot School of Theology http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/catholic/virgil_michel/; See also Roland Millard, "The Spirit of the Liturgical Movement: A Benedictine Renewal of Culture," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture,* Vol. 17, No. 4 (2014): 130-154; Charles Davis, *Liturgy and Doctrine: The Doctrinal Basis of the Liturgical Movement*. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1962); Katherine E. Harmon and Nathan D. Mitchell, *There Were Also Many Women There: Lay Women in the Liturgical Movement in the United States, 1926-59,* (Collegeville: MN: Liturgical Press, 2013); Keith F. Pecklers, *The Unread Vision: The Liturgical Movement in the United States of America, 1926-1955,* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 1998.

[32] Nolan, "Virgil Michael."

[33] Ibid.

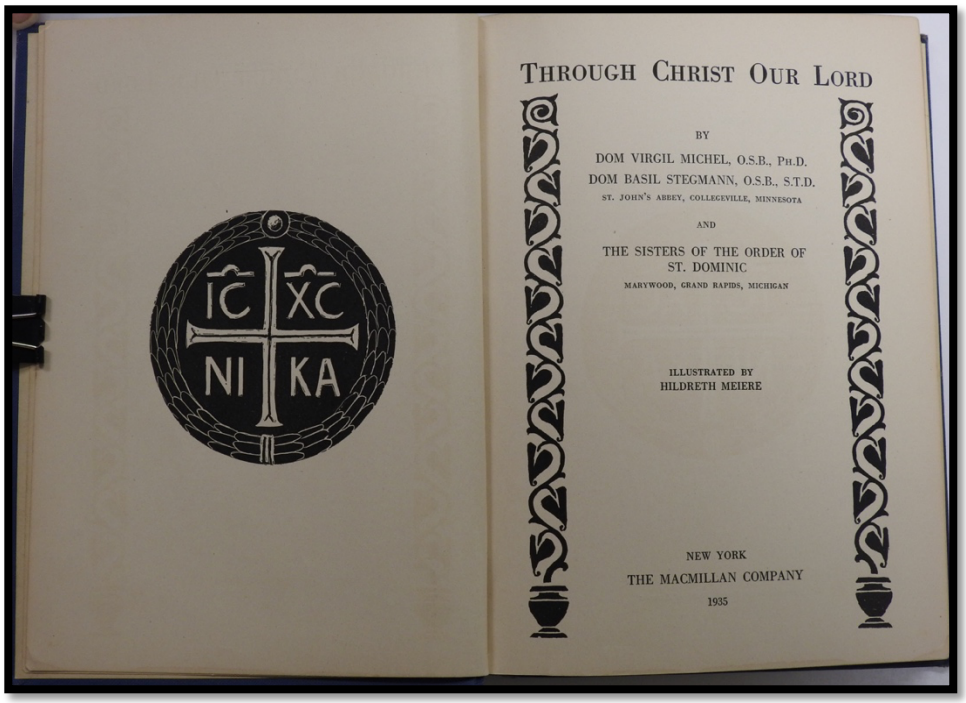

Fig. 1.3. Inside cover of a *Christ Life Series* textbook. The books were written by Sisters Murray and Hackett and other Marywood Sisters. Virgil Michael and Basil Stegman, however, were given authorial credit.[34]

this relationship was *The Christ Life Series* textbooks for elementary-age school children, which "had the goal of not only accruing the knowledge of the faith but also of living the faith in a way that affected daily life. This was a method of putting theory into practice."[35] The series was written by Murray and Hackett and other Marywood Sisters, and edited by Michel and Benedictine priest Basil Stedman, but "because the women did not have the credibility or the degrees the priest would put their names on the books. On the books the Sisters wrote . . .it says 'and Dominican Sisters. Not even their names."[36] Sisters Murray and Hackett went on to write two other series of textbooks, based on the Liturgical Movement.[37]

[34] Photo taken by author.
[35] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 58.
[36] Sr. Mary Kay Oosdyke, O.P., Ph.D., interview with author, June 18, 2018.
[37] Ibid.

There is some evidence to indicate that Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, perhaps inspired by the Liturgical Movement, engaged in early civil rights activism through their work as faculty and staff members at Aquinas College.[38] Throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, Dominican Sisters attended conferences held in Detroit to discuss racial issues. Sister Jerome Roach, sociology professor at the Catholic Junior College, along with Father Arthur Bukowski, inaugurated a series of weekly programs "to spread the faith among the Negroes."[39] Sister Malachy, the college librarian, gave a lecture on a Catholic Social Action Conference, held in Detroit in 1938, which discussed racism.[40] There, a black woman "gave a fiery address on the manners and customs used by whites to belittle and humiliate the Negro." They attended rallies that promoted inclusion, began and supervised an "Interracial Club" at Aquinas College, and promoted equality on the campus.[41] Attending the conference with Sister Malachy, was Sister Jane Marie, former English professor, who "was the inspirational force behind a movement at Catholic Junior College to discuss interracial problems."[42]

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[38] For the history of Aquinas College, see https://www.aquinas.edu/history-aquinas-college. It is difficult to pin down the exact nature of the Sisters' pre-Vatican II civil rights activism as it was customary to give credit to priests and bishops for work that was accomplished in the Catholic Church, even work that was obviously done by Catholic Nuns and Sisters. Further, the Sisters' own teachings prevented individual Sisters and congregations to take credit for such work as it would seem "boastful," and not in line with the required status of humility. This is also evidenced in early editions of Aquinas College yearbooks which have very few pictures of the Sisters, despite the Sisters owning, operating, and staffing the college. Despite being relegated by the Vatican's 1918 Code of Canon Law, which codified earlier restrictions on the lives of Women Religious, establishing a partial cloister "that severely limited their interactions with the world beyond the convent," there were some women's orders who managed to skirt the restrictions in the United States. Framing their activism as "missionary endeavors, arguing that their work required certain exceptions from the norms of cloister." For example, the Sisters of Saint Joseph (SSJ) of Rochester, New York, moved to Selma, Alabama in the 1930s to minister to black Selmians. There, they established the only hospital in Selma that would treat African Americans. See Amy Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6-7.

[39] "Center For Negro Instruction Opens," *Catholic Junior Herald,* November 21, 1938.

[40] "Librarian Reports Negro Discussions," *Catholic Junior Herald,* September 1938.

[41] Catholic Junior College, owned by the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, transitioned into a four-year degree granting college in the early 1940s. "Center for Negro Instruction Opens," *Catholic Junior Herald,* November 21, 1938.

[42] Ibid.

The Nun in the World: New Dimensions in the Modern Apostolate, a revolutionary book by Cardinal Joseph Suenens was published the same year as the opening of the Second Vatican Council, in 1963. It was a catalyst for Women Religious around the world. Coming from "one of Europe's most influential cardinals and a moderator of the Vatican Council." The book "carried a degree of authenticity and influence that simply could not be ignored."[43] Suenens called on Sisters to adapt to the modern world, in "internal and external attributes of their lives." Grounding his argument in the teachings of the church and "the calls of renewal that had begun" under Pope Pius XII, Suenens challenged Women Religious "to serve the cause of Jesus Christ and his Church according to the needs of the world today," and to do away with "customs and ways of doing things that hinder this service."[44]

A group of twenty-eight Marywood Sisters, faculty members at Aquinas College, began to study Suenens's book prior to the Second Vatican Council closing in 1965. Sister Marjorie Vangsness wrote, "All of us read it and were impressed by it. I wished we could do something with it. That was before the days of faith sharing and group meetings. Shaking in my boots, I proposed to the Sisters that we meet together," to discuss the book.[45] Weekly meetings ensued, with Vangsness noting that the Sisters who met at weekly discussions were becoming more bold in discussions and had become "more verbal at faculty meetings." Given that "there once was an unspoken rule that Sisters would say very little and always defer to the Superior and never publicly disagree with one another," for Sisters to begin openly expressing their opinions was indeed revolutionary.[46]

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[43]Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 60. For Cardinal Suenens, see Elizabeth Hamilton, *Cardinal Suenens: A Portrait* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975).
[44] Thompson, *The History of Women Religious in the United States,* Topic 15.
[45] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 60.
[46] Ibid, 60-61.

Two prioresses, Mother Victor Flannery, whose leadership led up to the Second Vatican Council and through its initial years, and Sister Aquinas Weber, who led the congregation immediately after the Council, were instrumental in preparing Marywood Sisters for the heady days that the Council set in motion.[47] Born Jennie Ursula Flannery, on April 5, 1895, Mother Victor was the fourth of twelve children of James and Jane McLaughlin Flannery, immigrants from Ireland and Canada. She was also one of five Flannery siblings who joined holy orders. After being taught by the Dominican Sisters at St. Joseph parish school in Saginaw, she entered the congregation in 1911 and began a thirty-seven-year career of teaching in grade and high schools throughout the state of Michigan. In 1919, Victor attended Central State Teachers College in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, (later Central Michigan University), where she was among "the first sisters of the congregation to attend summer sessions at state universities."[48]

In 1948, Mother Victor was elected the sixth prioress of the congregation, a position she held for eighteen years. During that time she steered the congregation's expansive building plans, yearly teaching and nursing assignments, and managed a large contingent of Women Religious.[49] On the eve of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, she navigated the congregation through what was "the night of our greatest sorrow."[50]

[47] "Mother," "Superior," and "Prioress," are used interchangeably and denote the leader of a congregation of Women Religious. Interview with Sisters Mary Navarre and Barbara Hansen. See also, Navarre, *Tapestry in Time*, 264.
[48] Mona Schwind, O.P., *Pieces: An Account of the Grand Rapids Dominicans, 1853-1966* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: West Michigan Printing, 1991), 251, 253.
[49] Navarre *Tapestry in Time*, 251.
[50] Ibid. 264, 265.

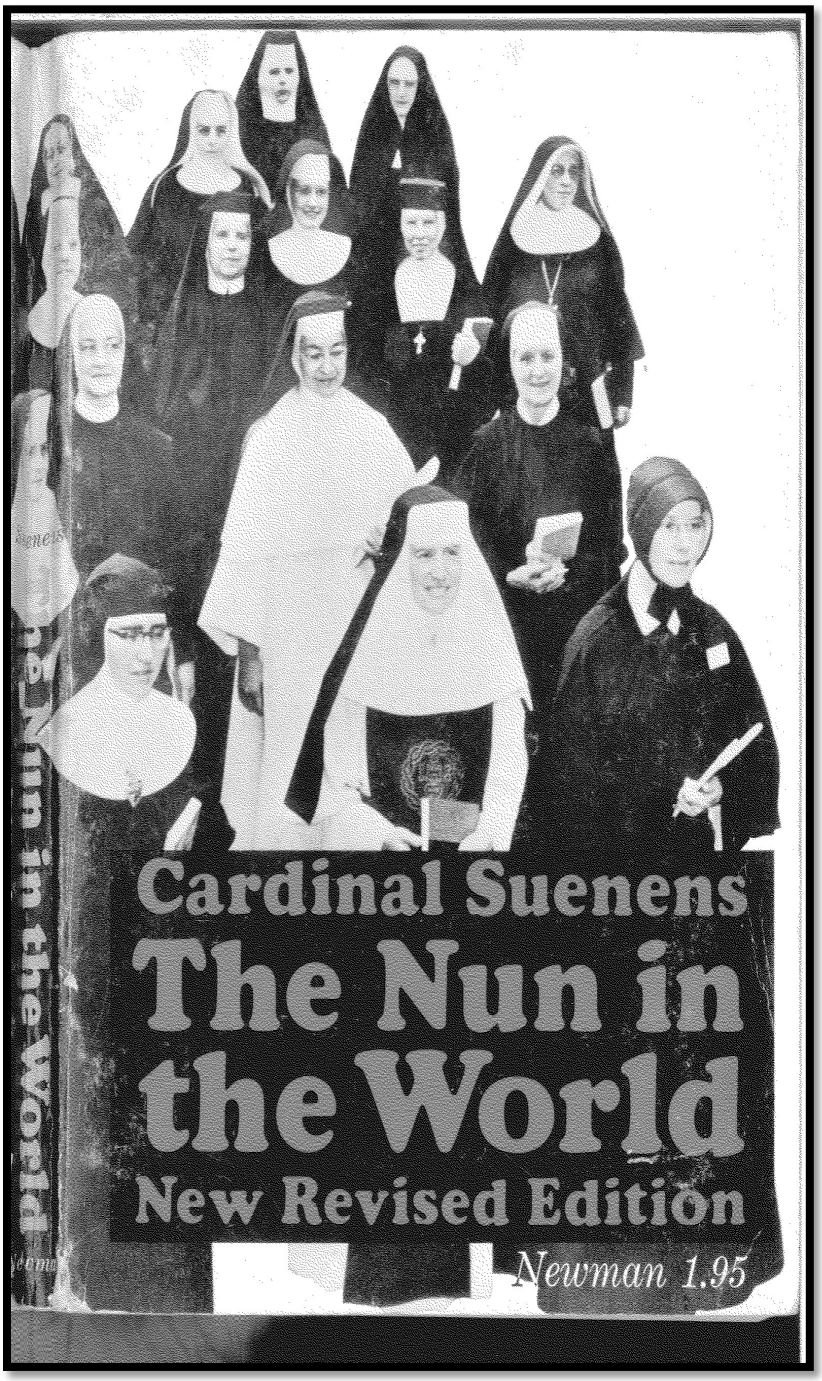

Fig. 1.4. ***Nun in the World,*** **by Cardinal Joseph Leo Suenens, 1962.**[51]

[51] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.

On September 28, 1962, seven Marywood Sisters, who were teachers in Essexville, Michigan, a small city located on the shore of Lake Huron, near the base of Saginaw Bay, were on a color tour traveling to Lake Leelanau, located on the other side of the state, near Lake Michigan when the station wagon in which they were traveling was struck head-on by another car. Four Sisters were immediately killed two Sisters were severely injured, and one Sister died two days later in a hospital in Reed City. The driver of the oncoming car, and his passenger were also killed. Three of the Sisters who died had biological Sisters in the congregation. The accident shifted the sense of the Sisters' mission, revealing to the congregation "that ministry meant more than working for an institution: it meant being part of a generous and loving Community engaged in the work of the Church."[52] Writing about the tragedy, Sister Mary Navarre noted that, "This moment too, was a strand in the converging forces for what followed, and a foretelling of the pilgrim Church waiting in the wings of Vatican Council II. For in its unfolding, the web of connections beyond the Congregation became evident, and the willingness of Sisters to go wherever the need was great became apparent."[53]

Two years later, in 1964, reflecting on the "fragility of life, the futility of certitude, the significance of the impending changes," that the Second Vatican Council sparked, Mother Victor wrote:

> The rapid changes and continued progress of our times will take extreme poverty of Spirit not to cling too much to the past. The present is our challenge, and we must meet it as Dominic would were he here today! In short, Sisters, what you and I must do today to be witnesses to Christ in the world is: Find Dominic's tune for this nuclear space age: find what our witness be and then adapt Dominic's tune to these needs.
>
> … Let us take up the challenge set before us and as good Dominicans throughout the centuries have always done, co-operate in every possible way with the clergy that the NEW LOOK the Vatican Council wishes may materialize according to

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid, 265.

the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.[54]

In 1966 Mother Victor, leaning on the long history of the Dominican Sisters, steered the congregation towards the future as she passed on leadership to her successor, Sister Aquinas Weber. Sister Weber was born Lucille Weber on May 2, 1923, grew up on her family's farm near Traverse City, Michigan. The fifth of eleven children born to Anna and Jacob Weber, Lucille attended Catholic grade and high schools staffed by the Dominican Sisters. Graduating from St. Mary's High School in 1940 she did not enter the order immediately after graduation, as was the norm for young Catholic women entering vocations before the war. Rather, Weber spent several years working in Detroit at a chemistry laboratory, Parke-Davis, putting labels on medicine bottles. After two years at Parke-Davis, Weber found that she "wanted more intellectual stimulation."[55] She thought about getting a college degree and teaching.[56] She also had begun to think seriously about entering religious life, recalling the days of the Great Depression and how her parents' "faith brought our family through" difficult times.[57] She entered Marywood in 1944 and joined a congregation of five hundred Sisters. Completing her bachelor's degree at Aquinas College in 1947, she embarked on an education career that spanned twenty-five years before she was elected prioress in 1966 to oversee the dramatic changes that the Second Vatican Council, and the social movements of the 1960s, brought to the congregation.

Noting the challenges the congregation was facing in the1960s Sister Aquinas, reflected a deep understanding of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially *Perfectae Caritatis,* which addressed vowed religious life, she observed that,

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[54] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 265; Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 320.
[55] Gary Eberle, *Going Where We are Needed: A Life of Sister Aquinas Weber, O.P.* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Aquinas College, 2013) 8-13
[56] Eberle, 8-13. "Sister Aquinas Weber," https://www.grdominicans.org/sisters/sister-aquinas-weber/.
[57] Ibid, 13; Ibid, "Sister Aquinas Weber."

> All of us realize that the renewal of a Religious Community is serious and perilous work—one which involves much faith, hope, and trust, but one which is not without risks. While the Church enjoys a divine guarantee of indefectibility, a religious order does not have such assurance . . . We are mindful that the first and foremost the starting point for renewal must be the Gospel. The charism of the founder also enters into the works of renewal . . . current practices of the Congregation must be judged and remodeled against Gospel values and the truly evangelical insights of the founder.[58]

Believing that the foundation of renewal "must be the Gospel," and the charisms of St. Dominic, Sister Aquinas was known to have the "Gospel in one hand and the traditions of the Dominican order and the daily newspapers in the other."[59] The entire congregation, having been prepared by the Liturgical Movement, the revolutionary writings of Cardinal Suenens, the reorienting tragic deaths of six Sisters, and the notable leadership of two prioresses, "began what would be decades of intense study and experimentation," to incorporate the Second Vatican Council's encyclicals to their lives and their social justice ministries.[60]

[58] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 62-63.
[59] Ibid, 63. The charisms of the Dominicans, also called, pillars, are: prayer, ministry/service, study, and common life/community, https://www.grdominicans.org/who-we-are/.
[60] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 63.

Fig. 1.5. Sister Aquinas Weber, O.P., after her election as Prioress in 1966.[61]

Catholic Social Teaching and the Second Vatican Council: Where Faith and Justice Meet

Catholic social teaching is a "cohesive body of thought" developed over the last one hundred and twenty years in response to various social issues outside of the church.[62] Beginning with Pope "Leo XIII at the end of the nineteenth century and continuing through the present pontificate of Francis," these teachings were born out of the "seismic cultural shifts brought on by the Industrial Revolution in the Western world.[63] The Catholic Church, in its social teachings, moved beyond a sectarian approach to religion, it has, at least intermittently, recognized that "we live in a world where people have bodies as well as souls. Where people struggle for justice and

[61] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[62] Kevin E. McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ava Maria Press, 2010), xi.
[63] Ibid.

peoples' aspirations are not just for spiritual enrichment but also to live a reasonably comfortable life."[64]

Catholic social teachings are typically presented as encyclicals, "which are formal papal documents that present the Church's position regarding some issue of concern."[65] Pope Leo XIII issued the first social teaching in 1891, with his landmark encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (*On Capital and Labor*). This document "addressed some of the problems that were emerging in shifting and often volatile relationships between management and labor in the industrializing nations of the world."[66] In part, some historians have noted, the encyclical was inspired, in part, by the fears of Catholic clergy that if the working classes, who were being exploited and were paid starvation wages, "did not see the church as their advocate," they would turn away from the church and turn towards communism instead.[67] In a "clarion call to reverse the trends towards starvation wages," *Rerum Novarum* noted that,

> Working men are now left isolated and helpless, betrayed by the inhumanity of employers and the unbridled greed of competitors. A tiny group of extravagantly rich men have been able to lay upon a great multitude of unpropertied workers a yoke little better than slavery itself.[68]

Rerum Novarum called for a "range of beneficial interventions in the economy," that implicitly questioned the capitalist laissez faire economic system.[69] As scholars have noted, *Rerum Novarum* did "not go nearly so far as the encyclicals of more recent popes in articulating the requirements of social justice, and in offering specific criticisms of the structures and practices

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[64] Thomas Masssaro, SJ. Ph.D., *Catholic Social Teaching,* Now You Know Media, audio recording, 2017.
[65] Bishops can also release social teachings as well. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released pastoral letters. These letters "built upon the encyclical teachings, providing concrete domestic applications for the United States." McKenna, xi. See the pastoral letters written by the United States Conference of Bishops, the *Challenge of Peace*, 1983, *Economic Justice for All,* 1986.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Massaro, *Catholic Social Teaching,* topic nine.
[68] *Rerum Novarum 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html*
[69] Massaro, *Catholic Social Teaching,* topic nine.

which lead to poverty and oppression."[70] What it did, however, was to lay a "solid foundation on which the later social encyclicals and other Church documents could build."[71]

Each successive pope after Leo XIII addressed critical social concerns. By 1968, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops "provided a key framework" and seven key themes in the church's social teaching.[72] The seven key themes, which are found throughout Catholic social teaching, and for which the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters also root their social justice activism are the Life and Dignity of the Human Person; the Call to Family, Community, and Participation; Rights and Responsibilities; the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; the Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity; and Care for God's Creation.[73] While issues regarding labor and capitalism are rooted in the 1891 *Rerum Novarum,* other topics were raised during the Second Vatican Council and in other encyclicals and pastoral letters promulgated by bishops.[74]

Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council in 1963 to start a process "that would engage the church with the modern world," what he called "*aggiornamento,"* literally "bringing the church up-to-date."[75] The Council also sought to help "facilitate the response of communities of women religious to the twentieth century" and laid the groundwork for "renewal," the period of Catholic Women's orders initiating a period of intensive change. [76] Its encyclicals affirmed the dignity of every person and emphasized "the foundational solidarity of the Catholic Church for

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[70] Donald Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching,* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books,1983) 11.
[71] Ibid.
[72] McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*, xii.
[73] Massaro*, Catholic Social Teaching,* Introduction; McKenna, *A Concise Guide to Catholic Social Teaching*, xii.
[74]*Rerum Novarum: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html.*
[75] Amy Koehlinger, "American Sisters Haven't Strayed. The Vatican Has," *Religion and Politics: Fit for Polite Company,* July 20, 2012.
[76] Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America,* (New York: New York University Press 2013), 156.

individual persons . . . especially those who suffer from poverty, injustice, and war."[77] The encyclical, *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World,)* the synod of bishops' *Justice in the World,* proclaimed shortly after Vatican II, and Pope Paul's "ringing challenge, 'How then will the cry of the poor find an echo in your lives," resonated with Catholic Women religious in regards to their future social justice activism.[78] *Gaudium et Spes,* "was eminently clear about the role of the church."[79] "The Church was for the world, it's mission in the world."[80] Catholic Women Religious, therefore, "found themselves increasingly driven to incorporate 'action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world' into their formulations of religious ideas."[81]

Combined with the church's social teachings, the social encyclicals helped the Sisters to form a social justice conscience that brought them squarely into the public realm by addressing the most pressing issues of the day. Sisters "considered themselves responsible for bringing their collective power to bear on the needs of contemporary humanity . . . the very Gospel in which their identity was rooted required action of them."[82] Where and how the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters worked for social justice, moreover, was always evolving as the Sisters learned to read "the signs of the times" and to go "where we are needed."[83]

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[77] Amy Kohlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2007) 4.
[78] Lora Ann Quiñonez and Mary Daniel Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); "Justice in the World," World Synod of Catholic Bishops. https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf
[79] Quiñonez and Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters,* 38.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid, 22.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Mary Kay Oosdyke, O.P., Ph.D.., Interview with author, June 19, 2018; Eberle, *Going Where We Are Needed.,* 12. Going where the Sisters were needed did not emerge after the Second Vatican Council. From the time that Catholic Sisters entered the Americas they addressed the needs of the society, initially addressing the need for hospitals and schools.

The phrase, "reading the signs of the times," comes from the Second Vatican Council's encyclical, *Gaudium et Spes,* which states that "the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel," and the Church "labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs, and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age."[84] On a practical level, reading the signs of the times meant getting out of the convent and engaging in the world by "reading newspapers, watching the news, go to college and talk to people,"[85] to learn about what is impacting people.

American Sisters, including the Grand Rapids Dominicans, "responded obediently and often enthusiastically to the immense" challenges conveyed by the Second Vatican Council.[86] For the next fifteen years, Sisters "read and debated theologies of religious life" and reflected on their role in contemporary society.[87] What followed was an often a dizzying and often chaotic era of self-evaluation in which the Sisters surveyed their communities and wrote, "detailed reports on their findings," and holding open chapter meetings. For the first time Sisters talked freely," and "reached a working consensus about the form and direction," that they should take "in the light of the Second Vatican Council" and the world with which they were now to engage.[88]

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[84] Pope Paul VI, "Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes," December 7, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

[85] Mary Kay Oosdyke, O.P., Ph.D., Interview with author, June 19, 2018.

[86] Koehlinger, *New Nuns,* 3.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time* ,66, 85. *Perfectae Caritatis (Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life),* asked Women Religious to adapt their lives, including the governing structures of their communities, "while also remaining faithful to the purpose and insights of both Sacred Scripture and their founders." This was to occur "in collaboration with all members of their congregations and/or institutes. This notion of both collegiality and subsidiarity was distinctly modern," and revolutionary. These changes, also called renewal, "would happen through General Chapters and Chapters of Affairs."

Sister Mary Navarre, reflecting on the changes after Second Vatican Council, acknowledged there was "intense work in raising social consciousness and the Community's response to it."[89] Prior to the Council, "the ministry of the Congregation had been primarily in education, with a few Sisters involved in nursing and social work . . . Now the vision of working for social change was to have a new direction with Sisters becoming more involved in decision making and forging into new ministries to effect systemic change."[90] The changes taking place within Marywood, and the development of a new social justice consciousness among the Sisters, was noted by Sister Platte. In 1985, she wrote that,

> My Grand Rapids Dominican family, like many other religious communities of women throughout the United States . . . discerned as women and as religious, new applications of church values and teaching in society. We developed a new consciousness of justice and solidarity with the poor. One of our chapter recommendations in 1969 asked us 'individually and corporately to effect societal change by making our own convictions known to national and local leaders, so that social injustices in the areas of housing, employment, health, education and law enforcement may be corrected.' During the last fifteen years we have recorded support for sisters actively assuming leadership and diocesan, civic, regional, and national organizations and movements to promote justice and oppose oppression. Women religious enthusiastically pursued these new ministries . . . We are moved by our potential for future contributions to the Church and society.[91]

As a congregation and as individuals, the Sisters' social justice consciousness changed dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s. The social encyclicals of the church, and their willingness to engage with the social issues of the day, moved them to pursue new ministries that promoted justice.

Converging with the Sisters' new social justice activism were the social movements in the United States at the same time Sisters were systematically studying the findings of Vatican II and

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[89] Navarre, *Tapestry of Time,* 238.
[90] Ibid, 239.
[91] Ardeth Platte, "Public Office: An Option for One, a Mandate for Another," in *Between God and Caesar: Priests, Sisters and Political Office in the United States,* ed. Madonna Kolbenschalg (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 272-281.

integrating them into their religious lives. The ongoing war in Vietnam, the civil rights movement, and the emerging women's movement, along with the "teachings of Vatican Council II, significantly affected the emerging social consciousness of the congregation as Sisters engaged in prayer, study, and public action on behalf of justice."[92] Sisters "took to the streets," to add their voices to the civil rights movement and to protest the Vietnam War, "joining peace and justice organizations until the end of U.S. involvement in 1975."[93]

During the late 1960s and the 1970s, the Second Wave Women's movement created further awareness of gender inequalities within society and within the Catholic Church. While the Sisters' main identity is rooted in their faith some Sisters embrace feminism, seeing it as a means to analyze and address the injustices women faced, including Women Religious' status in the Catholic Church.[94] For the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, the Second Wave Feminist movement and the encyclicals of the Second Vatican Two broadened their ideas about the dignity and equality of women. Moreover, individual Sisters, like many women, define feminism differently and "differ widely in their analysis of injustice, levels of commitment to liberating action, degrees of explicitness of commitment, and opinions about specific problems and their solutions."[95] Most Sisters I interviewed define "feminist" and "feminism," as "a position that involves a solid conviction of the equality of women and men and a commitment to reform society so that the full

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[92] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 240.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Many Sisters I spoke with shared this sentiment. "The Vatican, 'feminism' and U.S. Women Religious," *Global Sisters Report,* June 17, 2015, https://www.globalsistersreport.org. The hierarchy of the Catholic Church opposes feminism as a contradiction of its teachings on the role of women in families and sexuality. For discussions of feminism and the Catholic Church, see Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women: A Contemporary Challenge to Traditional Religious Authority* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995); Susan Marie Maloney, "The First Feminist Nuns: The Immaculate Heart Community of California," in Lisa Dresdner, *(Re)interpretations: The Shapes of Justice in Women's Experience* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); Mary Henhold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008). Edward Collins Vacek: "Feminism and the Vatican," *Theological Studies,* Vol 66, No. 1 (2005), 159-177.
[95] Barbara Reid, O.P. *Wisdom's Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretation of the Scriptures,* (Grand Rapids: Mi.: Eerdmans, 2016), 6.

equality of women is respected, which also requires reforming the thought systems that legitimate the present unjust social order."[96]

There are congregations of Catholic Women Religious in the United States who openly identify as feminists. For the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, however, feminism is an individual stand with some Sisters openly identifying as feminists and others manifesting feminist principles relegating that identity as secondary to their religious identities. As a congregation, the Sisters' feminism springs from their faith and the encyclicals of the Second Vatican Council which proclaims the dignity of all persons and the primacy of each person's conscience. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' feminism can best be described as women who "connect the struggle for women's dignity with respect for all life, all of nature, in all of the cosmos," taking a "holistic approach, understanding that we are all connected in one web of life, and that the well-being of one affects that of all." They also "see a link between human domination of nature and male subjugation of women, both of which are upheld by patriarchal systems."[97]

One of the most profound applications of feminism to the Sisters' spiritual lives was in their prayer life.[98] Becoming "aware of the importance of language in prayer, and noting that historically only "male references for God and male pronouns for humanity" were used in Scripture and the liturgy of the Catholic Church, the Sisters "grappled with the question of inclusion and who God is and, ultimately, who they were."[99] Not all Sisters were bothered by using

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[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.
[98] A similar definition of feminism is that of Sister Joan Chittister's: "a person who is committed to the humanity, dignity, and equality of all persons, to such an extent that she or he is willing to work for changes both in relationship patterns and in institutional structures to achieve this goal." Joan Chittister, *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing), 7. For more on Catholic feminists see, Mary Jo Henhold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
[99] Henhold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 8. Marywood Sister Barbara Reid, O.P., is one of the leading scholars in feminist interpretation of Scripture and continues to redress the deep inequities within the Catholic Church. To that end, she is

male pronouns for God, but others found it increasingly difficult. They engaged in intense study of Scripture and feminist theology to discover "a deeper awareness of themselves as created in the image and likeness of God," and what it truly meant "to be the church."[100] To that end, "there was a gradual, though intentional movement toward the use of inclusive language in the community's communal prayer"[101] and with the assistance of Father Greg Heille, O.P. developed an inclusive psalter.[102] This inclusive adaptation of Scripture "opened the members of the Congregation to a deeper awareness of who they were called to be—women of wholeness, healing, and hospitality: wholeness in their own preaching of the Gospel, healing in their ministries, and hospitality in their living."[103]

The inclusive use of language in the Sisters' prayer life was but one step leading them to lives of wholeness and healing. As Sister Navarre recalled, they "began to see the truth in the statement that 'to speak accurately of God and lovingly to our neighbor requires the use of inclusive language. Anything less is a rejection of God's revelation of God's selfhood and a withholding of God's gift to the needy, food for the hungry, and cure for the sick.[104]

A further catalyst to the Sisters' growing social justice consciousness came in 1971 with the election of Sister Marjorie Vangsness as Prioress, who later became a member of the Social Justice Committee of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).[105] The LCWR is

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General Editor for the *Wisdom Commentary Series,* a fifty-eight-volume feminist commentary of the Bible, published by Liturgical Press.

[100] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 8.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] The Leadership Conference of Women Religious is "the association of the leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States." It has about 1350 members "who represent nearly 80 percent of the approximately 38,000 women religious in the United States." It was founded in 1956 and "assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today's world." https://lcwr.org/about. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith was established in 1542 to prevent heresy. Today it is the body that promotes and protects Catholic doctrine. For more information on the history of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, see "Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, the Vatican,

the largest association of leaders of Women Religious in the United States. Under Vangsness's leadership and an increasing knowledge of injustice in society Marywood Sisters "joined forces with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers, supporting boycott efforts for labor reform and union recognition."[106] They participated in local issues on "racism on housing," and other social justice causes.[107] Others joined NETWORK Lobby, a social justice lobby of politically engaged Sisters, founded in 1971, and based in Washington, D.C.[108]

https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/storia/documents/rc_con_cfaith_storia_20150319_promuovere-custodire-fede_en.html; Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei, "Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious," The Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20120418_assessment-lcwr_en.html.

[106] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 241.

[107] Ibid, 241.

[108] Catholic social teachings are central to the mission of NETWORK. "In December 1971, a group of Catholic sisters voted to create a nationwide "network" of women religious who would engage in political activism at the federal level for social justice. Representing diverse ministries, including direct service and community organizing, the 47 sisters from across the U.S. were meeting in Washington DC at a time when the church was undergoing dramatic changes in response to Vatican II reforms and calls to create "Justice in the World." Many had also boldly joined the waves of civil rights, feminist and anti-war activism that were sweeping the U.S. "The Network" (now called NETWORK) officially opened our doors in April 1972. Staff members initially lived and worked in the same house in Washington, which also served as a place where local activists gathered for Saturday-night liturgies and other events." Network Lobby for Social Justice, https://networklobby.org/.

Fig. 1.6. NETWORK members, left to right, Sisters Susan Ridley, O.P., Marjorie Vangsness, O.P., Jeanne Marie Jones, O.P., and Jackie Hudson, O.P., cir. 1980.[109]

With Sisters engaged in the political advocacy work of NETWORK, "many more Sisters were lending their voices and actions to the cause of peacemaking and justice."[110] By the mid-1970s, some Sisters were committing acts of civil disobedience and some were getting arrested, but it "was only the beginning of the Sisters' willingness to pay the price for their commitment to justice."[111]

[109] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[110]Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 242.
[111] Some of the first civil disobedience actions were protesting alongside Caesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers. Navarre, *Tapestry in Time*, 241.

In the 1980s the Sisters continued to "read the signs of the times," and addressed social needs. Mid-decade, they created a monthly newsletter for the Sisters, *Option for Justice,* "to establish a perspective on peace and justice which would encourage each member to address the issue with respect to her life and ministry."[112] They also addressed their corporate investments and assets "including assessing everything that the Sisters held in common."[113] To this end, a Philosophy of Investments Policy was established "with specific guidelines for investing," to assure that the congregation did not invest in corporations that violate social justice practices.[114]

During the 1990s, the Sisters addressed the lack of living wages for workers in Grand Rapids by giving their own employees "a 'living just wage,'" as reflected "by the many social justice documents issued by the Church."[115] Prioress Barbara Hansen, who was "steeped in the encyclical tradition, which since its emergence with *Rerum Novarum* had argued for the moral necessity of the living wage," was determined to make the congregation's social justice ideals a reality.[116] Initially, Hansen's plan faced stiff resistance, especially from the congregation's operations advisory committee. It included "a number of affluent lay Catholics," who "had little prior exposure to the encyclical (*Rerum Novarum)* tradition's teaching on economic issues. To some of them, the living wage proposal smacked of 'Communism."[117] After the congregation wrestled with the "difficult questions of how to implement this (living wage) as a policy for all congregational employees, and considering the financial implications for the congregation, the living just wage was embraced as policy" after the Sisters sold three hundred acres of property in

[112] Ibid, 243.
[113] Ibid, 245.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Heath W. Carter, "Walking in Solidarity: Dominican Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in the Modern United States," in *Preaching with Their Lives: Dominicans on Mission in the United States after 1850,* ed. Margaret M. McGuinness and Jeffery M. Burns (New York: Fordham University Press, 2021), 108-138.
[116] Carter, 125.
[117] Ibid.

New Mexico, "to endow the Living Wage Fund." Despite the financial implications, the policy was implemented "across their campus in 2000," but it remained a challenge to "extend and maintain."[118] When the congregation subcontracted its care for elderly Sisters, they had to accept that "those workers would not make a living wage."[119] Because of their living wage, the congregation also lost out "on opportunities to host events on its campus due to its higher catering fees, which spring in turn from higher labor costs."[120] Under Prioress Maureen Geary, 2012-2018, the congregation had to keep "looking at its (the living wage policy) affordability, especially given that there are realities of diminishing resources."[121] As the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters moved towards the twenty-first century they continued to discern "where to plant their feet, how to identify and work to address injustices." Noting that the congregation applies "Gospel principles and Catholic social teaching" they would continue to identify "those social ills to which they would give their lives."[122]

[118] Ibid, 128.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 258.

Fig. 1.7. Marywood Sisters joined other Women Religious to help in the clean-up efforts after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005.[123]

Navigating the Pitfalls of the Patriarchy of the Catholic Church and Society

For centuries Women Religious struggled against male authority within the patriarchal culture of the Catholic church.[124] The Church could, and did go, to great lengths to control Women in Religious orders and the vast resources they possessed. While many Catholic clerics had, and continue to have, great respect for Sisters and have treated Sisters as equals, there is a well-documented history of priests and bishops, including those at the highest level of Vatican, who have sought to control Women Religious and limit their role in the Catholic Church. Margaret

[123] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.

[124] On governance within the Catholic Church, see "Code of Canon Law, Book I. General Norms, Title VII. The Power of Governance (Cannon 129-144), https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib1-cann129-144_en.html. How much authority a bishop held over a Congregation of Women Religious depended largely on its status within the Church. Congregations under the direct authority of the Vatican, called Pontifical Right, had more authority over their congregations including finances than non-pontifical right congregations which were under the authority of bishops. However, all congregations of Women Religious were reliant on clergy to administer the sacraments. The topic of who has the authority of congregations of Women Religious is a murky and contested area, as was seen in the Apostolic Visitation in 2009. Legal scholars continue to debate that issue. Today, priests, bishops, and even the pope have as much control over Women Religious as they do over any other Catholic. Interview with Sister Mary Navarre, November 20, 2021.

Susan Thompson, a noted historian of Catholic Women Religious in the United States, reports that "confrontations (over Sisters' autonomy) between Sisters and clerics have been a constant and a central fact of life in American Catholicism."[125] Thompson further notes that not only have confrontations between Sisters and clerics been frequent, but they also dominated nearly every congregation she has studied over her long career.[126] Despite the control that the hierarchy of the church exerted on Women Religious, Sisters could navigate successfully around this power to exert their will. While Catholic Women Religious seldom confronted the authority of the church prior to the Second Vatican Council, they did, from time to time, exert a non-confrontational form of agency to ensure that their ministries were fulfilled. After the Second Vatican Council, however, as many Women Religious absorbed the full meaning of the Council's encyclicals and the 1960s and 1970s social movements, they integrated the order's dual "commitment to their Catholic faith and to the struggle" to promote equality of women, including Women Religious.[127] Firmly grounded in their faith and their identity as women, they were resolute in their commitment to implementing their social justice projects and were not easily dissuaded by institutions, whether it be the hierarchy of the Church, or governments or local organizations, to thwart their efforts.

Efforts from within the Catholic Church to control Women Religious often came in the form of a local priest or bishop exercising his nearly limitless authority over a congregation of Sisters or confining them to specific roles and tasks within the Church.[128] The Grand Rapids

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[125] Margaret Susan Thompson, *The History of Women Religious in the United States,* topic eleven.
[126] Ibid.
[127]The social movements which expressed the Sisters' struggle for justice and equality include the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the Second Wave women's movement, and the farm workers movement, among others. Mary Kay Oosdyke, O.P., interview with author, June 2018. Mary J. Henhold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 1.
[128] Works documenting clerical attempts to control Women Religious in the United States include, Madonna Kolbenschlag, *Authority, Community, and Conflict* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1986); Margaret Cain McCarthy and Mary Ann Zollman, *Power of Sisterhood: Women Religious Tell the Story of the Apostolic Visitation*

Dominican Sisters working relationships with the majority of bishops were generally cordial, but they were not passive in the face of those who sought to exert extreme control over their congregation. Such was the case with Joseph Pinten, bishop of the Grand Rapids diocese from 1926 to 1940. His interactions with Marywood Sisters provide insight into the ways clerics attempted to control the Sisters, but also the Sisters' resolve to effectuate their agency. Conflicts could, and did, arise over seemingly trivial matters, such as habits, or on more serious matters, such as the right to vote in presidential elections, and the order's status within the Church.[129]

Conflicts between clerics and Sisters over the clothing they wore (commonly known as habits) were a common point of contention within women's religious orders across the country in particular after the Second Vatican Council.[130] Bishop Pinten, in the 1930s, demanded that the Sisters stop driving automobiles because he believed it was indecent that the public could see the white sleeve of a Sister's habit hanging out the window as the Sister made a signal for a left turn. To address Pinten's restriction on driving, the prioress, Mother Eveline Mackey, ordered the congregation's Sister-seamstress to sew black sleeves for the Sister-drivers to slip over their white sleeves.[131] While some may view Mother Mackey's solution as whimsical or even as subversive in circumventing Pinten's restrictions, it proved successful. Sister Navarre noted that "the Sisters

(New York: University Press of America, 2014); Annmarie Sanders, IHM, *However long the Night: Making Meaning in a Time of Crisis: A Spiritual Journey of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious* (Self Published, 2018).

[129] I discuss these conflicts later in this chapter.

[130] In 1935, Father Louis Nolan, O.P., a staff member of the Master General and Sacred Congregation for Religious in Rome, outlined his decrees for all Dominican Sisters in the United States to have "uniformity of the religious habit, especially with regard to material and form of guimpe (collar) and headdress . . ." Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 187-188.

[131] Interview with Sr. Mary Navarre, O.P., December 7, 2020. One of the most well-known incidents that involved a struggle between clerics and Catholic Women Religious is that of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), Los Angeles, and the conflict with Cardinal James McIntyre over changes instituted by the Sisters after the Second Vatican Council. Rather than bowing to the Cardinal's demands to maintain the habit while teaching, a tradition that many Catholic Women Religious discarded after the Second Vatican Council, the majority of the Sisters left the order and began another community outside the Catholic Church. More recent incidents are the two Vatican investigations into the lives of apostolic women's orders in the United States that occurred in the twenty-first century, which will be discussed in the conclusion.

simply *had* to drive" to complete their mission work, and they *were* going to complete their missionary work.[132]

As a means of control, clerics could also withhold the Sacraments, refuse to allow a congregation to take out a loan for a building project, reduce the salaries of Superiors, or refuse to let Sisters travel outside the diocese for conferences or to search for new apostolates.[133] Often, a prioress obeyed her superiors' overreach, if she agreed with the directive, was intimidated, or felt powerless in the face of their strictures. During the 1928 presidential election, which pitted the controversial Catholic candidate, Al Smith, against Herbert Hoover, to use only one example, Pinten insisted the Prioress order her Sisters to abstain from voting in the election. Not wanting the Sisters to seem partial to the Catholic candidate, Pinten argued that they would "make enemies by working for one man . . ."[134] The Prioress followed through with the order telling the Sisters not to "misinterpret" the directive and that they were "not being robbed of your right to vote."[135] She asked her Sisters to "not say anything about this injunction to anyone outside the community," most likely realizing that the order would be understood as a serious violation of the Nineteenth Amendment that had been passed only eight years earlier, and perhaps, more to the point, it violated the specific injunction to separate church and state.[136]

Bishop Pinten also egregiously sought to prevent the Sisters from obtaining Pontifical Right status, also called Pontifical Approbation. While still having to rely on the local bishop for certain religious duties, such as administering the Sacraments, Pontifical Right transfers the immediate control of a congregation from the local bishop to the Pope and gives that congregation

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[132] Navarre, Interview, December 7, 2020.
[133] Ancona, Gasper F. *Where the Star Came to Rest: Stories of the Catholic People of West* Michigan, Éditions du Signe (France, 2001), 78. Sister Anne Marie Ezenwa, EHJ, JCD, "From Diocesan to Pontifical Right," (blog), July 9, 2018, https://www.ehjsisters.com/2018/07/09/from-diocesan-to-pontifical-right/.
[134] Schwind, *Period Pieces,*183.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.

more autonomy and greater status. For a congregation to receive Pontifical Right status required a change in a congregation's constitution which outlined the fundamental relationship of a congregation to the Church. Rewriting a congregation's constitution took years of study, reviews, and edits by the congregation and examinations by clerics trained in Church law. It meant translating the constitution into Latin and finally sending the new constitution to the Vatican for the Sacred Congregation of Religion to study and approve it.[137] In 1894, Mother Aquinata began the process of obtaining Pontifical Right and that process was handed down through successive Prioresses. By the mid-1930s, and not wanting to lose direct control over the Sisters, Bishop Pinten delayed the approval of Pontifical Approbation. He commanded clerics in Rome to cease working on the new constitution and told Vatican officials the Sisters were not pursuing Pontifical Approbation when in fact they had never stopped seeking it. In 1936 he refused to inform the Sisters that the Vatican had indeed approved the new constitution and their status as Pontifical Right.[138]

There is no record of Mother Mackey's response to Bishop Pinten when, in June 1936, after receiving her own copy of the approval by the Vatican of their new status, Pinten made an unannounced visit to Marywood, stating that "I am here as the bishop of Grand Rapids . . . and as the Superior of this community."[139] He announced that he had "not received any communication from the Holy See relative to the juridical status of the Dominican Sisters of the Diocese of Grand Rapids."[140] Pinten refused to acknowledge the Sisters' new Pontifical Right status throughout the remainder of his tenure. Sister Mackey, despite the continued attempts by Bishop Pinton to control the congregation, demonstrated her own subtle leadership in dealing with his intrigues by often

[137] Ancona, *Where the Star Came to Rest,* 78; Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 181-183.
[138] Ancona, 78.
[139] Schwind, 194-95.
[140] Ancona, 78; Schwind, 194-95.

ignoring the bishop and in some cases, outright defying him. After Pinten's death in 1945, the official notification from Rome announcing the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' status of Pontifical Right, was found in the bottom of his cedar chest.[141]

Efforts to control Women Religious did not always come from within the Catholic Church, however. As this dissertation shows, forces outside the Church—such as governments, militaries, neighborhood associations, the public, and even the media—often attempted not only to derail the Sisters' activism, but also to narrowly define the Sisters' identities when their activism was at odds with government policy, power, or the status of these institutions of church and state. The public and the media, in their hostility to some of the Sisters' social justice projects relied on pre-Vatican II ideas of religious womanhood such as submissiveness and obedience. Women Religious at times exerted their will in the face of deadly natural disasters as is seen in the cases of Sisters serving in Latin America where they faced deadly hurricanes and earthquakes and extreme poverty. Their strong desire to continue serving in those countries was often at odds with congregational leadership who were responsible for the Sisters' safety as well as the overall ministerial goals in those countries.

Catholic Sisters learned how to navigate through the many ways that the Church and the public endeavored to shape and control their behavior and identities as Women Religious. While many historians and other scholars have often assumed that Women Religious have been, and continue to be, far more oppressed than Protestant and secular religious women, they ignore the actions and assertions of Women Religious who demonstrate a powerful, yet indirect, form of

[141] It is my understanding that Mother Mackey never confronted Bishop Pinten regarding his attempts to prevent Pontifical Approbation and his refusal to recognize the Sisters new status; she simply ignored him and many of his directives. Other members of the Catholic community struggled with Bishop Pinten as well. Two years into his bishopric an anonymous typed letter circulated among clergy members which ridiculed him and his closest advisors. Pinten, on learning of the letter, searched for the typewriter and its author. Legend has it that Pinten discovered the typewriter and that it has been sitting on the bottom of the Pere Marquette River ever since. Ancona, 77-78; Navarre, Interview with author.

agency.[142] This dissertation will argue that Women Religious could, and did, achieve their goals by exercising an agency that often remained invisible to the public. When the Sisters' agency *was* seen in public, as in their attempt to establish a rehabilitation home for former prostitutes, in their civil disobedience protests against nuclear weapons, or in uplifting the lives of the poor in Latin America, the Sisters were often sharply chastised for stepping outside the outdated and narrowly defined roles of acceptable behavior for Catholic Women Religious.[143]

Catholic Women Religious, including the Grand Rapids Dominicans, often share stories about the members of their congregation who demonstrated independence in the face of authority as a means of not only defining their collective identity but also as a reminder of the creative agency they have acquired over the centuries. These stories suggest the importance of these stories to their corporate identity as independent-minded women who have a long history of overcoming obstacles, large and small. This study also demonstrates that far from being powerless victims of the patriarchy of the church and other institutions, Women Religious have "means to private and public power that often remain invisible to the dominant culture."[144] This does not mean that Women Religious did not struggle for power within the Catholic hierarchy, or were always successful in their attempts to assert their will, but "rather the assumption of their chronic and total victimization by Catholic men masks the dynamics of those gender struggles and does little or nothing to further historical understanding" of Catholic Women Religious.[145]

[142] A discussion of this topic is located bellow.
[143] This case is studied in Chapter Two.
[144] Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion,* 5.
[145] Ibid, 7,8.

Significance

This study seeks to accomplish several goals. First, it aims to add to the neglected topic of Women Religious in the historical narrative. As historians Elisa Camiscioli and Jean Quartert have noted, women's history began as a recuperative project of writing women back into the historical narrative in order to establish women as subjects, followed by identifying neglected topics of race, class, and sex that undercut the original project of writing women into the narrative.[146] What Camiscioli and Quartet missed in an otherwise comprehensive essay was the neglect of women's religion and faith. This study will address this absence to make women's history more inclusive by simply telling the stories of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters and how their faith shaped their social justice activism.

This dissertation is also, however, part of a larger project whereby some historians are asking *why* Catholic Women Religious, particularly their social justice activism, have been erased from historical memory.[147] I argue, that Women Religious' near invisibility in the historical scholarship is linked to a supposition that assumes that Catholic Women Religious have been, and continue to be, more oppressed than Protestant and secular women. This framework establishes a hierarchy of liberation wherein Western secular women are seen as the least oppressed and "the most religiously orthodox women, whether Catholics, Jews, or Muslims, the most oppressed."[148] Furthermore, this framework also ignores the assertions of Women Religious, and other religiously-inclined women, who claim to have an agency that effectuates changes in their lives and in their communities.[149] This dissertation demonstrates that Women Religious, as seen through

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[146] Elisa Camiscioli and Jean H. Quartaret, "Who Counts as the Subjects of Women's History" *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 28, no. 4, (Winter 2016,), 113.
[147] Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion,* 1-12.
[148] Fitzgerald, 7; Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
[149] Fitzgerald, 5.

their social justice activism, have agency that effectuates changes in their lives and in their communities.

Scholars have examined the ways in which Catholic Women Religious have "faced hierarchical barriers and gender discrimination by the institutional church," and how Sisters have attempted to navigate the various forms of discrimination within the church.[150] While this is true, I argue that it was not just the hierarchy of the church that attempted to limit the Sisters' autonomy. Other authoritative forces have as well.

While researchers are beginning to recover the histories of Women Religious, the current state of scholarship usually falls into a narrow group of categories: Women Religious in early Church history and medieval history, or, from American historians, Women Religious in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with a particular emphasis on state-building and social reform. Stories of pioneer Sisters, establishing schools and hospitals in the west, are also receiving attention by scholars.

Research by scholars has uncovered a lively history of the early church mothers—the foremothers of present-day Catholic Nuns and Sisters and their role, and that of medieval women in the establishment of the mendicant orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans.[151] Notable women such as Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Avilla, also are the subject of popular biographies as are studies of medieval convents throughout Europe.[152] Studies of

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[150] Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion,* 7.

[151] For an example of these histories, see Laurence Lux-Sterrett and Carmen M. Mangion, eds., *Gender, Catholicism, and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrove MacMillan, 2001; Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Martha Vincus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago, Il.: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Siobhan Nelson, *Say Little, Do Much: Nurses, Nuns, and Hospitals in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

[152] Teresa of Avila*, The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila, by Herself.* Translated by J.M. Cohen (London: Penguin Classics, 1988; Matthew Fox, *Hildegard of Bingen: A Saint for Our Times* (Vancouver, B.C.: Namaste Publishing, 2012). A good primer on medieval nuns includes the following: Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, eds. *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c.1500* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Sharon Strocchia,

American Women Religious tend to fall into the category of early American history or of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Maureen Fitzgerald's *Habits of Compassion,* which demonstrates the important role of Irish Catholic Sisters in the establishment of the welfare state in New York. Carol Coburn and Martha Smith also looked at how Catholic Women Religious shaped American culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Church and American Life, 1836-1920.*[153] Researchers are uncovering a surprising history of Women Religious, one that reveals the story of Catholic Nuns and Sisters who have throughout the history of religious communities "consistently disturbed the social order by living independently of men."[154]

Histories that address the latter half of the twentieth century tend to focus on the dramatic changes of Sisters' lives that followed on the heels of the Second Vatican Council, called "renewal," with a few studies focusing on the civil rights activism of a small number of communities of Women Religious. There are memoirs written by former Sisters who have chronicled why they left the sisterhood, or histories of individual communities written by Women Religious themselves for inspirational purposes.[155]

What is still largely lacking, however, are histories of Women Religious during the latter half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, especially studies of

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Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2009); Dianne Hall, *Women and the Church in Medieval Ireland, c. 1140-1540* (2003); Anne E. Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne* (2011); Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings: Hildegard of Bingen* (2009): Nancy Bradley Warren, *Spiritual Economies: Female Monasticism in Later Medieval England* (2005); Bartolomeo Riccoboni, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domni, 1395-1436,* (2000).

[153] Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion*; Carol Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Church and American Life, 1836-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[154] Thompson, *The History of Women Religious,* topic ten.

[155] For studies on the renewal of Women Religious after the Second Vatican Council, see: Lora Ann Quiñonez, CDP, and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1922; For works that examine the civil rights activism of Women Religious see: Amy Kohlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007).

the social justice activism of Women Religious.[156] What does exist in this time frame are histories of the Maryknoll Sisters, whose work in Central America resulted in the murder of several Sisters. Other studies include the Vatican's Apostolic Investigation of progressive convents and its investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), largely written by Sisters and the leaders of LCWR themselves, and stories of the dramatic drop in numbers of Women Religious. The decline in the number of Women Religious has captured the attention of a few journalists who tend to portray Women Religious as either complete victims of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church or radical feminists gone wrong, both allegedly detrimental to the Catholic Church.[157] Kenneth Briggs, a former religion editor at the *New York Times,* studied the diminishing numbers of Women Religious and placed the blame for the decline squarely at the feet of bishops whom he sees as arrogant patriarchs unwilling to share authority with their female co-workers. Oversimplifying the reasons behind the diminishing numbers of Women Religious, Briggs casts Women Religious as near-absolute victims of a patriarchal institution rather than women with agency, *despite* the patriarchal order under which they live.[158]

Ann Carey, a popular conservative journalist, argues in articles and in her book, *The Tragic Unraveling of Women's Religious Communities,* that women religious have "lost their way, becoming radical feminists out of line with their role as consecrated women in the Catholic

[156] Histories of social justice do examine Catholics in social justice movements, especially early activism, such as the Catholic Worker Movement, but Women Religious are largely left out of these histories. This dissertation will add to that history. For Catholics in social justice movements, see Jeremy Bonner, Christopher D. Denny, and Mary Beth Fraser Connolly, *Empowering the People of God: Catholic Action Before and After Vatican II* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Albert J. Raboteau, *American Prophets: Seven Religious Radicals and Their Struggle for Social Justice* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

[157] The most recent book on the Vatican investigation of the LCWR is, *However Long the Night: Making Meaning in a Time of Crisis, A Spiritual Journey of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious,* edited by Annmarie Sanders, IHM, (Silver Spring: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 2018) is written from the perspective of the leaders of the LCWR who experienced first-hand the investigation.

[158] Kenneth Briggs, *Double Crossed: Uncovering the Catholic Church's Betrayal of American Nuns*, (New York: Doubleday Religion, 2006).

Church."[159] She too oversimplifies the decline in the number of Women Religious, largely blaming progressive orders of moving beyond what the Vatican mandated for Women Religious. She further asserts that if Women Religious simply went back to "authentic" living and not criticizing Church teachings, young women would enter religious orders in droves.[160] Suggesting that progressive orders are not faithful or "authentic," Carey has also argued that progressive Women Religious are perpetuating dissent "to get attention for their attacks on settled Church teachings."[161]

Grand Rapids Dominican Women Religious would vociferously reject both views. Rather, they see themselves as "resourceful, intelligent, prayerful, and pastoral women," following their faith, in part, *through* their involvement in social justice activism.[162] This project, therefore, will add Women Religious to the historical narrative and demonstrate that Women Religious were obedient to the Church, and were neither passive victims of the Church's male hierarchy and other authoritative institutions, nor wayward feminists hell-bent on destroying the Church. Despite living under what is considered an extremely patriarchal institution, Grand Rapids Dominican Women Religious exercised a great deal of agency, both in their religious life, and as seen through their social justice activism.

The second goal of this dissertation is to answer the following question: did American Catholic Women Religious in the decades after the Second Vatican Council figure as important

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[159] Ann Carey, "'Progressive' Orders are Passing Away—the Future Belongs to the Faithful," *National Catholic Register*, November 1, 2017.
[160] Ibid. Critics of progressive orders and their decline often point to the increase in the number of vocations in the conservative orders. While the number of young women entering conservative orders is higher than that of progressive orders, there are many ways that young women today can practice her faith outside of vowed religious life, whereas the number of very conservative Catholic organizations dedicated to women's faith is more limited.
[161] Ann Carey, *Sisters in Crisis: The Tragic Unraveling of Women's Religious Communities* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997).
[162] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 282-83.

historical markers of agency where social, cultural, and political conflicts were being waged?[163] I define agency as "what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important. Agency invokes an ability to overcome barriers, to question or confront situations or oppression and deprivation, and, as individuals or together with others, to have influence and be heard in society."[164] Furthermore, as argued by Naila Kabeer, "women's agency leads to empowerment when its exercise questions, challenges, or changes regressive norms and institutions that perpetuate the subordination of women."[165] Women, including Women Religious, "can exercise agency in many different ways: as individuals and collectively . . . through their participation in markets, politics, and other formal and informal institutions." [166]It is my contention that the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, as individuals and as a congregation, exercised agency as they confronted injustices in their communities and overcame barriers that prevented them to enact their social justice projects.[167] In the United States, Catholic Women Religious have been able to "transform not only the lives of millions of Catholics but also the social and humanitarian character of the nation itself."[168] As the three case studies of the Sisters' social justice activism discussed in this dissertation demonstrates, the Sisters were able to exert their agency at the local, national, and international levels *and* effectuate changes in their communities.

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[163] This question comes from Dr. Maria Wendeln and our many discussions about the ways in which women can exert agency despite being constrained by various institutions.
[164] Lucia Hammer and Jeni Klugman, "Exploring Women's Agency and Empowerment in Developing Countries: Where Do We Stand," *Feminist Economics,* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2016), 237.
[165] Naila Kabeer, and Agneta Stark, ed., *Global Perspectives on Gender Equality: Reversing the Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 157.
[166] Hammer and Klugman, "Exploring Women's Agency," 238.
[167] It is important to recognize that despite a rich body of academic literature on agency, it is inherently difficult to measure. Furthermore, it is also important to recognize that not all the Sister's social justice projects came to fruition or saw the outcomes that they had hoped their activism would produce. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, however, would not see this is as evidence of "failure." Believing that "success" is a cultural construct, the Sisters argue that what is important is whether or not they acted on their faith and followed their convictions regardless of the outcome. Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert, interview with author, April 2019.
[168] Thompson, *The History of Women Religious in the United States,* topic one.

The final goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate the sacrifices the Sisters have made and the extreme danger they faced in implementing their social justice projects. Stories of earlier Sisters facing near-insurmountable difficulties in the 18th and 19th centuries are well known, but discussion in this vein of the Sisters' challenges and sacrifices in the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries are lacking.[169] From attempting to negotiate with hostile neighbors opposed to social justice projects in their neighborhoods, to spending time in prison for protesting against nuclear weapons, to living under brutal authoritarian regimes, kidnappings, and deadly natural disasters, the Grand Rapids Dominicans have demonstrated a tenacity that few scholars have acknowledged.[170]

The social justice activism of Catholic Women Religious, like the Dominican Sisters in Grand Rapids, is scarcely visible in the historical narrative. This dissertation will fill in this gap by investigating how the intersection of faith and agency allowed Women Religious to make an impact on social justice issues at the local, national, and international levels. Documenting the social justice activism of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, we will be able to see how they "read the signs of the times" and became important historical markers of feminist agency while they struggled to address the many needs of society.

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[169] For examples of these histories, see Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve, A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013; Mary Ewens, O.P., *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America: Variations on the International Theme* (Self-Published, 2014); John Fialka, *Catholic Nuns and the Making of America,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

[170] Because scholars have not examined extensively the social justice activism of Women Religious in the latter half of the twentieth century and early twentieth-first century, what has been written about Nuns and Sisters ministering in treacherous conditions is largely situated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Women Religious in these centuries were faced with almost insurmountable difficulties, such as extreme poverty, lack of resources, including food, and epidemics. Their tenacity is rightly acknowledged.

Methodology and Sources

Analytically I have looked to Maureen Fitzgerald whose work on Irish Catholic Nuns in nineteenth-century New York challenged the framework of American women's history which rendered women of "non-dominant cultures" as "objects," without access to agency and the inability to influence society.[171] Fitzgerald's work helped me look for the agency of Catholic Women Religious, which may appear invisible because of the "assumption of their chronic and total victimization by Catholic men."[172] Furthermore, as Fitzgerald has pointed out, Sisters' agency and effectiveness, in part, was based on their "ability to live together and organize themselves as large bodies of single women who . . . become powerful collectives for activist labor through the sisterhoods' combined labor power . . . and their freedom from mothering and direct control of husbands."[173] The collective nature of their lives allowed Catholic Women Religious to devote their energy and resources to social justice activism in ways which secular women, because of career and family restraints, were rarely able to accomplish.[174]

I have also looked to Rebecca Sullivan's work on Catholic Women Religious in American popular culture and how American culture perpetuated the idea of Catholic Women Religious as "signifiers of moral certainty," and embodiments of Victorian ideas of respectability which complicated Sisters' attempts to discard older ideas of acceptable behavior and ministries. The collective nature of their lives allowed Catholic Women Religious to devote their energy and resources to social justice activism in ways which secular women, because of career and family restraints, were rarely able to accomplish.[175] Finally, theologian and Grand Rapids Dominican

[171] Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion,*7.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid, 9.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

Sister, Barbara E. Reid's work on interpreting Scripture by relying "on women's wisdom" and "biblical texts," to promote equal dignity and value for all," has helped me understand the Sisters' "consciousness about women's treatment as second class in society and in the church," the formation of their feminism, and how their faith and feminism intersected to impact their social justice activism.[176]

To reconstruct the Sisters' social activism, I used a range of source material. I have relied heavily on primary materials located in the archives of the Grand Rapid Dominican Sisters and the Plowshares archives located at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, which hold the papers of Sisters Platte and Gilbert. Primary resources regarding the Leadership Conference of Women Religious are located online were easily accessed as were many Vatican documents. Other information was gleaned via personal interviews. I conducted over a dozen interviews with members of Marywood, which proved invaluable in helping me understand the scope of their social justice activism, but also the ways in which their faith intersected with their agency and the pressing social issues that they addressed. Especially helpful were the interviews with Sisters Gilbert and Platte who provided me with first-hand accounts of their protest actions at nuclear weapons bases and their time spent in prison. My interview with Sister Jean Reimer was also invaluable in her account of her kidnapping in Guatemala. My many interviews and discussions with archivist, Sister Mary Navarre was most helpful in reconstructing the activism of the Sisters but also on how the intersection of faith, feminism, and social justice emerged and evolved since the Second Vatican Council. I was also able to access taped oral histories of Sisters that helped me reconstruct the Sisters' social justice activism.

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[176] Barbara E. Reid, O.P., *Wisdom's Feast: An Invitation to Feminist Interpretation of the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016).

Chapter Outline

Chapter Two*, "The Position That a Nun and a Prostitute Are the Same is an Extraordinary Argument" The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters Serving People on the Margins of Society,* examines the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' social justice activism at the local level and their attempt to establish a rehabilitation home for former prostitutes on their campus in the early 1990s. After a two-year intensive self-reflective study to set their ministerial goals for the future, they determined to direct their energies into addressing the most pressing social needs in their community. Eager to address homelessness for women, they hoped to establish a rehabilitative home for former prostitutes on their campus but faced fierce resistance from a local neighborhood association. Their identity as Women Religious was also fiercely criticized for purportedly stepping beyond the boundaries of what the neighborhood association and the media, believed to be acceptable behavior for Women Religious. At the heart of this chapter is the Sisters' acknowledgment of sex workers' dignity, prostitutes' need for assistance, the pressure the public and the media put on the Sisters to maintain Victorian ideas of womanly behavior, and how the Sisters attempted to navigate around the controversy.

Chapter three, *Turning Swords into Plowshares: Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters and the United States' Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movement,* looks at the Sisters' social justice activism at the national level. Here I focus on the social justice activism of Sisters Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson, who protested the United States' involvement in wars, the country's nuclear weapons, and nuclear weapons manufacturing facilities by radical acts of civil disobedience. While not all Marywood Sisters participated in acts of civil disobedience, the congregation, as a whole, stood behind Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson. The three Sisters acknowledged their ability to devote their lives to this issue was, in many respects, due to congregational support. Sisters who did participate in acts of civil

disobedience, as is seen in the activism of Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson, were often arrested with several Sisters given lengthy prison sentences for their actions. Here, too, their acts of civil disobedience brought a great deal of attention, and sometimes criticism, as Women Religious who appeared to be stepping outside the boundaries of appropriate behavior for Catholic Sisters.

Chapter four, *Is She Ready to be Buried There? Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters Serving in Latin America,* examines the work of the Dominican Sisters in Peru, Honduras, and Guatemala, where they often faced life-threatening natural disasters and lived under violent authoritarian regimes. In this respect, it emphasizes the 1981 kidnapping of Sisters Jean Reimer and Helen LaValley in Guatemala. This chapter not only documents the great lengths the Sisters went to address injustices but also reveals the nature of their activism which was seen as dangerous by authoritarian regimes and a threat to governmental authority. While the Sisters serving under military regimes in Latin America were often charged with revolutionary political activism, they saw their social justice activism as an outgrowth of their faith, the Second Vatican Councils' encyclicals, and Liberation Theology, as a means to address the needs of the poor and marginalized peoples in these countries.

The conclusion briefly examines the Vatican's most recent attempts to curtail Catholic Women Religious in the twenty-first century. Two investigations launched by the Vatican under the papacy of Benedict XVI, the Apostolic Visitation, and the investigation of the Leadership Council of Women Religious, for which Marywood is a member, focused on progressive Women's Religious in the United States. These investigations were another attempt by the Vatican to curtail the Sisters' activism and doctrine which they believed were contrary to the teachings of the Magisterium. The Sisters, however, believed that they were following the Gospel and the precepts of the Second Vatican Council. The chapter rounds out the study by examining the current status

of the Marywood Sisters. With dwindling numbers of women making vowed professions and a growing elderly population, Marywood Sisters made the difficult decision to sell their Motherhouse in 2020 and are currently in the process of moving from their home of almost one hundred years. It also discusses the Sisters' commitment to continue to be agents of social justice regardless of recently selling their campus.

Overview

Catholic Women Religious have a long and rich history of work and activism in the United States. Their history, however, has been often neglected by historians. Histories that do exist tend to focus on the early years of state-building in the United States or of the years immediately following the Second Vatican Council in which Women Religious around the country radically altered their lifestyles and ministries. This dissertation intends to fill in a much-needed gap in the history of Women Religious and their important social justice activism of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It also intends to provide a picture of Women Religious as historical agents in their own right, not passive victims of institutions that sought to curtail their activism. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters that are examined in this dissertation are exemplars of the Marywood congregation that engaged with the encyclicals of the Second Vatican Council and the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and responded with relatively contemporary ideas about what faith should be and how they should act on that faith within their ministries.

CHAPTER TWO: "THE POSITION THAT A NUN AND A PROSTITUTE ARE THE SAME IS AN EXTRAORDINARY ARGUMENT": THE GRAND RAPIDS DOMINICAN SISTERS SERVING PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS OF SOCIETY

In advocating for themselves and the people their social justice ministries might serve, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters turned to their faith, Catholic social teaching, and a deeply held conviction of the rightness of the Second Vatican Council's encyclicals that called on them to ease the pain and suffering of marginalized people in their community. In the late twentieth century, as the Sisters continued to broaden their social justice projects beyond traditional caregiving ministries, they attempted to establish a daycare center for impaired HIV-AIDS patients, a rehabilitative home on their campus for women leaving prostitution, and a shelter for homeless women and their children.[177] However, they were opposed by neighbors who did not want these social justice projects in their neighborhood. This resulted in a heated conflict between the Sisters and a powerful neighborhood association that not only fought to prevent these ministries from being established on the Marywood campus, but also vilified the Sisters for straying from older religious identities and missions they expected of Women Religious.[178]

Losing some battles with their neighbors and winning others, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters deftly tried to balance bringing justice to marginalized people in Grand Rapids with attempting to be good neighbors. Simultaneously they defended their own autonomy and sense of identity as Women Religious. Despite the pressure posed by their neighbors, and the intense media

[177] During the height of the AIDS-HIV epidemic there were a number of Catholic Sisters and priests who were willing to sacrifice their reputations, and even ministries, to assist LGBT people as many Catholic Church officials were at odds with the lifestyles of homosexuals and the use of condoms, to prevent the spread of HIV-AIDS. Michael J. O' O'Loughlin, *AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear* (NY: Broadleaf Books, 2021); "The Complicated History of AIDS and the Catholic Church," *America: The Jesuit Review,* December 6, 2019, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/12/06/complicated-history-aids-and-catholic-church

[178] Older religious identities and missions is defined here as pre-Conciliar roles and behaviors expected for Women Religious, mainly teaching and nursing, largely confined to the convent, and compliant, especially regarding authority figures. These roles and behaviors were largely abandoned by most Catholic Women Religious after the Second Vatican Council.

scrutiny sparked by the controversies, the Sisters were not swayed to return to pre-Vatican II ideas of religious womanhood their neighbors insist they inhabit. Rather, serving as critical historical markers of agency, the Sisters insisted on implementing their social justice projects and demonstrated that they were faith-driven, independent-minded women, who were "professionally competent, heightened by values for empowerment," and were a "presence to the materially poor and (were a) counter-culture witness" to their neighbors and the world.[179] Despite the intense scrutiny from their neighbors and the media, and having to drop their plans for the HIV-AIDS daycare center and the rehabilitation home for prostitutes, the Sisters were able to establish a transitional shelter for homeless women and children on their campus after several intense legal battles. The shelter, the Salvation Army's Family Lodge, remained on the Marywood Campus for nearly ten years and successfully transitioned hundreds of women and their children from homelessness to healing.

The Building at 143 Lakeside Drive and Women In Need

In 1917, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters purchased thirty-four acres of lush, green, rolling pastures located in a small township just outside the city limits of Grand Rapids.[180] The township, also called "Grand Rapids," was later incorporated into the city, but for a few years, it remained tranquil and lightly populated. The newly acquired property was a perfect setting for the Dominican Sisters. The expanding number of young women entering their order and their growing teaching ministries required more space. By 1921, the Dominican Sisters began building a sprawling complex on their property. This building enterprise occurred at the same time small residential homes started to dot the surrounding neighborhood, which was populated mostly

[179] "Visioning to the Future: Future Use of the Marywood Complex, August 1 and 2, 1991." Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives, AR4.3, Dominican Weekend, 1990-1992.
[180] Mona Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 95.

by conservative middle-class second-generation Dutch families.[181] Even as the population began to diversify over the following decades, the neighborhood's mostly white and conservative character was a mainstay well into the late twentieth century.[182]

It was not unusual for Catholic Women Religious in the United States to build large campuses for their growing congregations during the early decades of the twentieth century and the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters followed that tradition.[183] Their new campus eventually included a large Motherhouse, an academy for teaching elementary and high school students called Marywood Academy, rooms to board female students, and other structures.[184] In 1923, the Dominican Sisters launched a two-year college for laywomen. By 1930, the school had transitioned into the first co-ed Catholic junior college in the United States. While they periodically had to reassert their administrative authority over the new college during Bishop Pinten's tenure, the Sisters, in 1940, successfully transitioned the junior college, newly named Aquinas College, into a four-year degree-granting institution, which was located across the street from the Marywood campus on its own sixty-seven acre campus.[185]

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[181] Linda Samuelson and Andrew Schriel, *Heart and Soul: The Story of Grand Rapids Neighborhoods* (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003) 52.
[182] Ibid.
[183] Schwind, *Period Pieces*, 175-177, 233-242.
[184] By the 21st century, Marywood Campus had several large structures on their property, including the Mother House, a modern healthcare center for aging Women Religious and a 49-bed skilled nursing facility for the public, and the Lakeside Drive building. Smaller accessory buildings also exist on the campus. In the spring and fall of 2020, the Sisters were forced to sell several structures on their campus, including the nursing facility and the Mother House. The sale of these structures, for which there are multiple reasons, will be discussed in the conclusion.
[185] Schwind, *Period Pieces,* 244-45; Gasper F. Ancona, *Where the Star Came to Rest,* 80-81; "History," Aquinas College, accessed February 1, 2020, http://www.aquinas.edu/discover-aq/heritage-traditions/history.

Fig. 2.1. Corner laying ceremony. Marywood Motherhouse, 1921.[186]

Despite the extensive facilities Catholic Women Religious built and managed in the United States, it was customary for Sisters to live a semi-cloistered lifestyle during the first half of the twentieth century.[187] The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters followed this practice, residing on their campus but working at Catholic schools, Aquinas College, local Catholic hospitals, or other Catholic parish schools throughout Michigan and elsewhere.

Despite Marywood Sisters' semi-cloistered status, the campus was busy with the Sisters' building projects and their students' comings and goings. Their neighbors accepted the industriousness of the Sisters as their activities remained primarily confined to the Marywood campus and at Aquinas College. Further, churches and schools situated within residential

[186] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[187] Before the Second Vatican Council most apostolic Women's orders lived semi-cloistered lives. By contrast, contemplative orders typically refer to orders who live a cloistered lifestyle, rarely leaving the grounds of a convent or monastery.

Fig. 2.2. Aerial view of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood campus.[188]

neighborhoods remained a typical zoning configuration in American neighborhoods.[189] Their lifestyle and activities were also located firmly in the gendered sphere of teaching and caring for children, which was considered appropriate behavior for women, protecting them from accusations of straying beyond suitable conduct for Catholic Sisters. Although the relationship between the Sisters and their mostly conservative Protestant neighbors was limited, in large part due to the Sisters' semi-cloistered status and differences between the two faiths, overall, it remained cordial.[190] Over the coming decades, the Dominican Sisters permitted their neighbors to visit their

[188] Undated photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[189] "Presentation Before the Board of Zoning Appeals," February 2, 1995. Rose Haven files, Marywood Archives.
[190] The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters often note that the Rose Haven/Family Lodge Controversy was the first controversy with their neighbors. Letter from Sr. Barbara Hansen, O.P. to Prioress Carmelita Murphy O.P., Srs. Margaret Schneider, O.P., Jarrett DeWyse, O.P., 28 August 1992, Rose Haven File, Archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

vast grounds to stroll through its beautifully manicured gardens, walk their dogs, or take their children, sleds in tow, to slide down Marywood's snowy hills during the winter months.[191]

In 1952-1953, the Sisters built an accessory building on their campus, located on a quiet side street next to the Motherhouse, at 143 Lakeside Drive. The two-story unassuming brick edifice was situated across the street from the residential homes that now populated the neighborhood surrounding the Marywood campus. The Lakeside Drive structure was explicitly built for visiting Dominican priests who primarily taught theology and philosophy courses at Aquinas College. Initially known as Aquin Hall, the building was considered an institutional congregate building and included six two-room suites, consisting of a bedroom and a study, and allowed six priests to live at the residence. Built without a kitchen and utility area, these exclusions to 143 Lakeside Drive were made because of the traditional custom of Catholic Sisters cooking and cleaning for clerics. Food preparation for the clergy, and presumably laundry services, were provided by the Sisters from the Motherhouse.[192]

In the late 1950s, the Lakeside Drive building was modernized to include a single independent kitchen, a new heating system, and a utility area, modernizing the structure, and making it a more independently functioning building. It is unknown if the Sisters continued to cook and clean for the priests after adding the kitchen and utility area.[193]

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[191] "Presentation Before the Board of Zoning Appeals," February 2, 1995. Rose Haven files, Marywood Archives. Despite a somewhat isolated relationship between the Sisters and their neighbors, there were still times when the two met. For example, in 1974, a neighbor's house caught fire destroying everything and leaving a family of nine homeless. The Sisters welcomed the young family into the convent and allowed them to stay for five months. Maureen Fitzgerald Penn, *Mission and Ministry,* Spring 2016, Vol. XIII, 5-6.

[192] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992. Rose Haven File, Archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

[193] Ibid.

Fig. 2.3. The Lakeside Drive structure as it looks today. A two-lane road separates it from neighborhood homes.[194]

By 1960, white flight and a massive residential building boom just outside the city limits rapidly withered the tax base of the city of Grand Rapids.[195] The majority of Kent County residents had lived in the city in 1940, but residents living in Grand Rapids fell a precipitous eighteen percent by 1960 despite new population growth in the city.[196] While the Marywood campus was located outside the city limits, it was considered prime real estate for city expansion.[197] Fears of further white flight compelled city officials to annex the Marywood campus and its surrounding neighborhood. Historically, under various Grand Rapids city zoning ordinances, the Marywood campus had been zoned R-1 (for single-family homes only). From the 1960 annexation to the

[194] Photo taken by author.
[195] Mark Hamersma, et al., v. The City of Grand Rapids, et al., Mi. 95-0931-AZ (Circ. Ct. Kent County, 1995). For white flight after World War II, see, Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (N.J., Princeton, 2005).
[196] Samuelson and Schrier, *Heart and Soul, 30*. On white flight in Michigan, see Thomas Segrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 52.
[197] Samuelson, 52; "David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992."

1990s, accessory buildings on the Marywood campus, including the structure at 143 Lakeside Drive, were "permitted accessory residential use" in connection with the explicit educational and religious uses of Marywood and Aquinas College.[198] In other words, as long as accessory buildings of a religious institution or school were used in conjunction with the mission of that church or school, the accessory buildings were permitted to exist within a zoned R-1 residential neighborhood.

While the residential zoning ordinance for the Marywood neighborhood did not undergo any significant changes after the city annexed the property, the proceeding decades, however, brought enormous changes to the Dominican Sisters' order.[199] As discussed in Chapter One, the Sisters witnessed changes in their religious life during the Liturgical Renewal Movement of the 1920s and 1930s, and from Cardinal Suenens's highly influential 1963 book, *The Nun and the World*. The Second Vatican Council, with all its liberal reforms and the Second Wave Feminist Movement reverberated deeply within the confines of Marywood. It is not an exaggeration to say that the last two events brought monumental changes to the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters corporately and individually as the Sisters modified their religious lives and greatly expanded their social justice activism throughout the 1970s and 1980s.[200]

By the beginning of the 1990s, Marywood Sisters had moved well beyond teaching and nursing ministries and were involved in dozens of social justice issues at the local, state, national, and international levels. They no longer owned Aquinas college, although many Sisters still served as administrators, faculty members, and as directors on the Aquinas College Board. They also no

[198] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992. Mark Hamersma et al., v. The City of Grand Rapids.
[199] Mark Hamersma, et al., v. The City of Grand Rapids.
[200] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 181.

longer used the Marywood campus as an educational facility for elementary and high school-age students and shuttered their academy in 1989.[201]

Another significant change to women's Catholic orders in the United States was a substantial drop in the number of women entering religious life. A much more diverse range of opportunities for women seeking secular, religious, and professional careers had sprung up for young women by the mid-to-late twentieth century. A further dramatic decline in numbers occurred when many Sisters left vowed religious life beginning in the early 1970s. Many Catholic Sisters also no longer wished to live in cloistered or semi-cloistered surroundings or in large religious communities, preferring instead to live in small groups off-campus while still maintaining strong communal ties with the Motherhouse. Living in apartments or small homes gave women the chance to better serve the people to whom they ministered and experiment with different forms of communal religious life. Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood were no different in these many respects and began experimenting with different living arrangements shortly after the Second Vatican Council closed in 1965. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, a significant number of Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters lived off the Marywood campus in homes and apartments scattered throughout the Grand Rapids area.[202]

The drastic changes to the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' ministerial professions and living arrangements, and especially the smaller number of women entering their order, resulted in significant changes to the uses of the buildings on their campus. By 1975, the Dominican priests no longer desired to live in Aquin Hall, now known simply as the "Lakeside Drive house," and vacated it. For the next several years, Marywood used the building as a retreat center for other Dominicans and local Catholics vowed and lay, who sought a quiet space for prayer and reflection.

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[201] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992..
[202] Navarre, 149.

From 1978 to 1992, they housed young postulants entering Dominican religious life. By January 1993, however, the upkeep and maintenance of the structure became cost prohibitive. With fewer Sisters needing the space, the house was vacated. It sat empty except for a short period during the summer of 1993.[203]

By the late 1980s, with a significant drop in their numbers and a growing population of elderly Sisters, along with nearly thirty years of radical changes, the Sisters embarked, collectively and individually, on an intensive two-year examination they called "Visioning to the Future." The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters' study began in 1989. It was meant to address many external issues they faced, such as how best to update and renovate their vast campus with its many aging buildings and how their resources, including the Lakeside building, could be responsibly used for future ministerial purposes. Further, the study had a crucial internal focus, and directed the Sisters to reflect on their identity as Women Religious—who they were and whom they wanted to be in the future in a world that had changed dramatically from the time most had entered the Dominican order.[204]

The "Visioning to the Future" study was, notably, conducted democratically involving the entire congregation of Sisters.[205] This reflected the impact the Second Vatican Council and the Second Wave Feminist movement had on the congregation. It was an astounding change from the highly autocratic methods of just a few decades earlier when a Mother Superior made decisions, large and small, for all her congregants, rendering each woman with little autonomy regardless of age or educational accomplishment.[206] Indeed, Marywood's General Council noted, after the

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[203] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992.; Mark Hamersma et al., v. The City of Grand Rapids.
[204] "Visioning to the Future: Future Use of the Marywood Complex, August 1 and 2, 1991."
[205] Since the Second Vatican Council's conclusion, the majority of women's Catholic congregations in the United States began experimenting and implementing dramatic changes to their governing methods, integrating all the members into decision-making processes.
[206] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 74.

completion of the "Visioning to the Future" study that, "the process of study and decision-making has been one that has involved the full membership."[207] The study "has demanded us to be initiators, proactively working with our membership and professional consultants."[208] It was a charge the Sisters took seriously.

Understanding that they had undergone monumental changes since the Second Vatican Council, a significant part of the study involved redefining their collective identity and their collective ministerial focus in ways that reflected their values as Catholic Women Religious living in the last decades of the twentieth century. Every Sister, no matter age, education level, or station, therefore, was asked to share *her* vision of the congregation's "present identity and its hoped-for future identity."[209] The "Visioning to the Future" study was a substantial and arduous undertaking. It resulted, however, in a detailed strategy that the Sisters hoped would guide them through the twentieth century and take them into the twenty-first century. Their refined vision of what it meant to be Women Religious would help them identify societal needs help marginalized people in the local community and beyond.[210]

When the "Visioning to the Future" study results were tallied and formulated in August 1991, the Sisters reached a consensus that their future "hoped-for identity" was one that was reflective of their understanding of their faith, feminism, and the need for social justice throughout the world. They saw themselves at that moment as women who were "spiritual, prayerful, ecumenical, hospitable, collaborative with the local church, and professionally competent."

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[207] "Visioning to the Future: Future Use of the Marywood Complex, August 1 and 2, 1991.
[208] The highest governing authority within a congregation is the General Chapter. "Visioning to the Future: Future Use of the Marywood Complex, August 1 and 2, 1991.
[209] Ibid.
[210] "Visioning to the Future," Future Use of the Marywood Complex, August 1 and 2, 1991."

Moreover, they looked to the future determined to be Women Religious "heightened by values for empowerment, (a) presence to the materially poor and (a) counter-culture witness.[211]

Using their “Visioning to the Future” study as a baseline, the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids concluded that their future ministry projects should embrace "real human need and witness to an option for the poor."[212] A particular focus of their social justice ministries would be marginalized members of the surrounding community. Their study confirmed that those who required the most assistance in the Grand Rapids area were HIV-AIDS patients, the homeless, and vulnerable women, and children.[213] The Sisters, accordingly, sought ways they could use their campus and resources to help these vulnerable groups. Significantly, then, they determined not to sell, "either in its entirety or piecemeal," the thirty-four acres they owned in Grand Rapids.[214] Instead, they sought to make the most cost-effective use consistent with their ministries to those in need of services.[215]

The Sisters consequently sought out programs in the Grand Rapids area to support, which would, in turn, enable them to utilize their unused and underused facilities. By leasing buildings or unused space on their campus to likeminded organizations they believed they were exercising financial responsibility by using the funds generated by potential leases to subsidize other ministries in New Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere.[216]

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[211] Ibid.
[212] "Option for the poor" is a theme central to Liberation Theology (discussed in detail in Chapter Four). Usually framed as a "preferential option for the poor," it refers to "giving preference to the poorest and most needy sectors and those segregated for any cause whatsoever." Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: 15th Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, New York: 1988) xxv; Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983).
[213] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992; Mark Hamersma et al., v. The City of Grand Rapids.
[214] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992.
[215] "Visioning to the Future: Future Use of the Marywood Complex, August 1 and 2, 1991."
[216] Interview with Sr. Mary Navarre O.P., December 7, 2020.

The local YWCA then approached the Sisters to lease the Lakeside Drive building to house abused women and their children, a function in line with their new vision. The funding for this program, however, fell through in the Spring of 1992, just as the Sisters were preparing to hold a meeting to introduce the neighbors to their new plans for their campus, which also included a spirituality center and their social justice projects, such as the home for reforming prostitutes.[217] Besides the vacant Lakeside Drive building, the congregation's healthcare facility, Aquinata Hall (not to be confused with Aquin Hall), where elderly Sisters received long-term medical care, had twenty unused bedrooms. The Sisters hoped to lease that space, as well, for ministerial purposes. A Christian non-profit rehabilitation organization in Grand Rapids, Hope Network, expressed a desire to lease several rooms in Aquinata Hall to provide daycare for elderly disabled HIV-AIDs patients.[218] This, too, eventually fell through due to funding, but not before Marywood's neighbors had heard about the proposal, sparking a three-year controversy over the Sisters use of their campus for social justice projects.[219]

Other ministerial options presented themselves in short order. The most important of these involved what in the nineteenth century would have been called “a Rescue Home.” The Sisters were interested in helping the marginalized population in the city of Grand Rapids, and no sector was more marginalized and stigmatized than sex workers—either current or former. The Lakeside Drive structure seemed the right kind of facility with a good location for this new mission. After

[217] "Visioning to the Future: Future Use of the Marywood Complex, August 1 and 2, 1991," Dominican Weekend File, 1990-1991, Archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
[218] A HUD grant was applied to renovate the first floor of Aquinata Hall for this purpose but was ultimately declined, scraping the daycare plan. Theresa D. McClellan, "Battle goes on to find HIV housing," *The Grand Rapids Press,* June 29, 1992.
[219] Theresa D. McClellan, "Battle goes on to find HIV housing," *The Grand Rapids Press,* June 29, 1992.

Fig. 2.4. Aquinata Hall. This facility is used to care for elderly Marywood Sisters. It was considered a possible site for a program to house a daycare center for impaired HIV-AIDS patients.[220]

renovations the building would be large enough to provide safe housing for ten to twenty women plus the women's children.[221] Being located next to the Motherhouse would also allow the Sisters to provide much needed free daycare for the children of the former prostitutes. It was also next to the bus route making it accessible to cheap transportation to travel downtown for other essential services such as counseling, medical care, and job training.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, cities throughout the United States considered how best to deal with prostitution and of sex workers as visible inhabitants who did not conform to societal standards of respectability.[222] With growing poverty and homelessness around the country

[220] Photo taken by author.
[221] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, 17 August 1992.
[222] Pheterson, *The Prostitution Prism,* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 30-37.

due to massive cuts in welfare and other assistance programs, prostitution was seen as a growing problem as more women, especially women of color, looked to the streets as other financial options remained out of reach. With the HIV-AIDS epidemic, and the public blaming prostitutes for its spread among heterosexuals, residents demanded that city officials get the women off the streets.[223] Many cities, however, had few solutions to deal with what they saw as a growing problem apart from arresting, fining, and or sentencing the women to jail, which did little to stem the problem. In Grand Rapids, business owners argued that prostitution had reached such proportions that sex workers were soliciting customers in front of their buildings frightening customers away. Parents complained that "the girls were doing their tricks in back yards and in cars next to houses where children were seeing it."[224] Dan Patchin, assistant manager of the Salvation Army's Rehabilitation Center Thrift Store in Grand Rapids, complained that not only were prostitutes frightening away customers, but the women were also stealing property. One prostitute allegedly stole money and a Salvation Army van that had been parked in the thrift store's parking lot. The "red van with Salvation Army logos on the doors" was later found, abandoned, in Jackson, Michigan, approximately 100 miles southeast of Grand Rapids.[225] In Grand Rapids, city officials arrested dozens of prostitutes weekly, either fining or jailing them, often in rural, small-town jails north of Grand Rapids, only to see them return to the streets after serving their sentences.[226] Not only was prostitution considered an unseemly crime that polluted the neighborhoods and streets of Grand

[223] Pheterson, Ibid; Jonathan Bell, "Between Private and Public: AIDS, Health Care Capitalism, and the Politics of Respectability in the 1980s," *Journal of American Studies,* Vol. 54, No. 1, (2020), 159-183; On the debate regarding prostitutes as victims or as women's choices of occupation and sexual expression, see Nancy F. Cott, ed. *Prostitution* (Munich: DeGruyter, 1993).
[224] Doug Guthrie, "Police press prostitution crackdown," October 7, 1992, *The Grand Rapids Press.*
[225] Ibid.
[226] Guthrie, "Police press prostitution crackdown."

Rapids, much of the public now viewed it as dangerous and a means to further the spread of HIV-AIDS.[227]

Recognizing that most prostitutes had histories of sexual and physical abuse and had few, if any options, advocates seeking to assist the prostitutes with protection, relief, or an exit out of the life, argued that the women were victims of a broken society and should not be treated as criminals. Running women sex workers through the criminal system, which both arrested and often punished prostitutes much more frequently than their clients, did little to stem the root problem and did not keep prostitutes off the streets of Grand Rapids.[228] Advocates maintained that what was needed was a comprehensive rehabilitation program that assisted prostitutes in finding safe alternatives to working the streets, rather than a system that served a revolving door of repeat offenders and tacitly supported those who profited from their sexual labor.[229]

A busy downtown street, South Division Avenue, was home to St. Andrew's Catholic Cathedral and the office of the Bishop of Grand Rapids, Robert J. Rose.[230] It was close to the epicenter of the sex trade in Grand Rapids, where most prostitutes worked the streets. It also literally kept the issue of prostitution at the forefront of the diocese.[231] Seeking to assist women who wanted to leave prostitution in a dignified manner that recognized the women's humanity, rather than "cleaning up the streets," Bishop Rose, in collaboration with the diocese of Grand Rapids and the Good Shepherd Sisters in Grand Rapids, whose order had nearly two centuries of

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[227] Pheterson, *The Prostitution Prism*, 9, 30-37.
[228] "Rose Haven: A House of Hospitality and Nurturing for Women in Prostitution," undated pamphlet, Rose Haven File, Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Attempts to access the archives of the Diocese of Grand Rapids were unsuccessful due to the illness of the Diocese archivist and the COVID pandemic which closed the archives off to the public. Information regarding Bishop Rose's role in Rose Haven for this project came from local newspapers, and the archives of the Dominican Sisters at Marywood, Grand Rapids.
[231] Theresa D. McClellan, "Rose Haven offers new direction, care for prostitutes," *The Grand Rapids Press,* November 29, 1992.

experience ministering to vulnerable women, including prostitutes, worked to establish rehabilitative program in Grand Rapids.[232] The program was subsequently named Rose Haven after Bishop Rose.[233]

Initially, the Rose Haven program was given space at a local seminary, St. Joseph's, in Grand Rapids. The safe house for the prostitutes, located at another site, served as a "place of hospitality and nurturing" and provided "safe, temporary living quarters," along with "intense one-on-one counseling."[234] Despite fundraising efforts and support from the Grand Rapids Diocese and Marywood Sisters, the St. Joseph site was becoming cost-prohibitive, and the home used to house the women was put on the market and the house was to be vacated by December 15, 1982. Further, those who worked for Rose Haven hired professional counselors, rather than relying on volunteers. They were also looking for ways to provide services to more women and eradicate prostitution in Grand Rapids, which also required additional funds.[235] The Diocese and the Good Shepherd Sisters, therefore, sought a new site that would house more women and the women's children, but which was also fiscally sustainable. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, having learned that the YWCA proposal for homeless women to use the Lakeside building fell through, saw that the Rose Haven program had a need that they could address. The Rose Haven program fit their "Visioning to the Future" mission of caring for vulnerable women and children. They therefore offered the use of the vacant Lakeside Drive building to Rose Haven for a nominal fee of $1.00 a year on the

[232] The Sisters of Good Shepherd, founded in 1621 in Caen, France, under the name of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, has had a long history ministering to girls and young women, especially" troubled girls" and prostitutes. Their branches in the United States began in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1842. Today, their focus is on social justice for women, children, and those on the margins of society. http://rgs.gssweb.org/en/node/11.
[233] Brigid Clingman, O.P., "Rose Haven Ministry," undated, Rose Haven File, Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
[234] "Rose Haven: A House of Hospitality and Nurturing for Women in Prostitution."
[235] Brigid Clingman, O.P., "Rose Haven Ministry."

day before a scheduled June 10, 1992 neighborhood meeting.[236] The Rose Haven program, the Sisters believed, was a response to justice, and they looked forward to assisting the Diocese of Grand Rapids and the Good Shepherd Sisters in establishing a safe, healing environment for the former prostitutes and their children in their Lakeside Drive building.

Because of the Lakeside Drive building's single-use design, its only practical use, the Sisters believed, was for congregate-living. Because it was institutional and utilitarian in appearance, they assumed that if they sold the structure, it would not appeal to middle and upper-class owners as the families in their neighborhood occupied cozy-looking bungalows, expansive ranch houses, and a few larger homes. Extensive funds would be needed to remodel the structure if it were to be put on the market as a single-family home. Further, the Sisters' attorney, David Smith, believed that Marywood's current zoning situation would allow the Sisters to proceed with the Rose Haven program without a zoning variance, given that under the city's ordinance, a church's accessory building could legally exist in residential neighborhoods.[237] Even though the program would not be physically ministered by Marywood Sisters per se, apart from the Sisters who hoped to volunteer to take care of the prostitutes' children, they still viewed the Rose Haven program as one of their social justice projects, shared with the Good Shepherd Sisters, part of their mission portfolio and in line with their newly revised ministerial goals that grew out of their "Visioning to the Future" study.[238]

On the day of the June 10, neighborhood meeting, the Sisters hoped they would be able to ease the anxiety and anger of their neighbors who had become increasingly agitated and concerned over the prospect of the Sisters' new social justice projects. The invitation went out several weeks

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[236] Prioress and Council Meeting, June 10, 1992. Rose Haven File, Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
[237] David L. Smith to Mr. William Hoyt, Director of Housing & Community Development, August 17, 1992.
[238] Ibid.

beforehand with a warm greeting and an offer to discuss their extensive renovation plans for their campus and their new social justice projects they hoped to implement. The product of the "Visioning to the Future" study, two of the Sisters' newly proposed social justice programs they were to discuss included the daycare center for disabled HIV-AIDS adults and the Rose Haven program. In hopes of having a productive conversation, the Sisters noted in their invitation that the meeting would "enable us to share our planning process and to gain a greater awareness of our neighbors' concerns."[239] More importantly, they yearned for a conversation with their neighbors that would enable them both to move past what was fast becoming a heated controversy in their quiet Grand Rapids neighborhood.

Rumors about the Sisters' renovation plans, their proposed social justice programs, and about the Sisters themselves, had spread throughout the neighborhood and the Sisters wanted to correct any misconceptions. By sharing their planning process and the rationale behind their decision to house marginalized people on their campus, they hoped their neighbors would not only understand their motivations more clearly, but that their neighbors, too, would welcome and support the new ministries into the neighborhood. Further, under Governor Engler's administration in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as under the Reagan and Clinton administrations, public funding for services for the poor and mentally ill was being slashed. The cuts had resulted in a dramatic rise of homelessness, poverty, and a need for assistance in the large inner cities throughout the state of Michigan.[240] Therefore, the Sisters believed it was vitally important to get

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[239] Prioress Carmalita Murphy to Marywood Neighbors, May 29, 1992, Rose Haven File, Archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

[240] There is much scholarly work regarding reducing welfare programs in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, and who was ultimately responsible for the poor and marginalized' welfare. Many Americans argued against reducing welfare spending and that the federal government had a responsibility to see to the care of those who could not care for themselves. Others argued that the responsibility to care for the poor should be taken up by charities and religious organizations. Michael B. Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 83-93. For discussions on welfare cuts in Michigan and the United States during the 1980s and 1990s, see Katz, *The Price of Citizenship: Redefining the American Welfare State*; Robert O. Self, *All in the*

their social justice projects off the ground. They were, however, cognizant of their neighbors' anxiety and resentment about the changes taking place on the Marywood campus. They also understood that their neighbors were struggling with the idea of Catholic Women Religious moving beyond traditional identities of teachers and nurses and taking on social justice projects they believed to be beyond the Sisters' remit. Being equally concerned about their neighbors' well-being, the Sisters hoped to repair the strained relationship with their neighbors while simultaneously advocating for women and children in need.[241]

The June 10 meeting, however, was anything but productive and cordial. Confusion over the YWCA program to house abused women, which unbeknownst to the neighbors had been dropped shortly before the meeting, due to a lack of funding, swirled with misunderstandings over the Rose Haven program for former prostitutes. Their neighbors came to the meeting believing that the Sisters had intentionally misled them about who might be housed in the Lakeside Drive building. The thought of elderly disabled HIV-AIDS patients wandering through the Marywood neighborhood triggered an intense fear, provoking some to lash out at the Sisters, and those the Sisters intended to serve. Private letters addressed to Marywood, and letters to the editor of the

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Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s (New York: 2012); Julily Kohler-Hausmann, "Guns and Butter: The Welfare State, the Carceral State, and the Politics of Exclusion in the Postwar United States," *The Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 2015) 87-99. Yvonne Zylon and Sarah A. Soule, "Ending Welfare as We Know It (Again): Welfare State Retrenchment, 1989-1995," *Social Forces* 79, no. 79 (December 2000): 623-652. Aziza Tahar-Djebbar, "The Bill Clinton Rationale for Welfare Reform: Examining Implications of Race, Class, and Gender using Documents," *Journal of Urban History* 1 no. 26 (August 2020): 1-26; Besharov, Douglas J. and Amy A. Fowler, "The End of Welfare as We Know It?" *Basic Interest* (Spring 1993): 95-108. American Catholic Sisters and Nuns have a long history of caring for the poor and sick in large and small cities, no matter the level of federal, state, or local assistance that was available to the public. For ways in which American Catholic Sisters began or assisted in welfare programs, see Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare State;* Dorothy Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Mary Ryllis-Clark, Heather O'Connor and Valerie Krips, eds., *Perfect Charity: Women Religious Living the Spirit of Vatican II* (Fenton, MO: Morning Star Publishers, 2015).

[241] The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters lived peacefully with their neighbors since the early 1920s. This was the first controversy the Sisters experienced with their neighbors. Rectifying the broken relationship with them was equally important to many of the Marywood Sisters, demonstrating that they cared for their neighbors' concerns and well-being. Memorandum, "Prioress and Council Meeting Minutes," 28, May 1992, Archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

local newspaper, reveal the frustration and panic-stricken fear of many neighbors, but also confusion about how the HIV-AIDS virus was transmitted among heterosexuals. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, leading scientists and doctors, much less the general public, did not fully understand how the virus was transmitted among heterosexuals.[242] With a high mortality rate and no known cure or viable treatment plan for those infected with the disease, among Marywood's neighbors were those who tended to lean towards extreme and unlikely scenarios when the possibility of having HIV-AIDS patients as neighbors in their near future was raised. Some argued that the HIV-AIDS patients were "mentally ill unemployed junkies," who would be "biting and spitting at innocent people," or that the virus might become airborne leading some neighbors to question whether or not they should “seal off their yards” to protect their children and grandchildren.[243] Most associated the spread of the HIV-AIDS virus with prostitutes and drug abusers who would, in turn, infect their pristine neighborhood, bring in male clients looking for sexual encounters, and endanger their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren.[244]

As much as the Sisters tried to control the tenor of the June 10 meeting, it turned contentious. Their neighbors grew even more resentful over the next several months. Despite the Sisters attempts to reason with MONA and communicate respectfully with their neighbors, later neighborhood meetings that year were more combative, with neighbors, and especially MONA leaders, accusing the Sisters of willful deception, malfeasance, and neglecting what they perceived to be appropriate and submissive identities as Catholic Women Religious. This fueled the already

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[242] Pheterson, 30-33.
[243] Jillian M. Gunn to Ms. Marty Ayres, 12 June 1992, Rose Haven Papers, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood; Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Syrek to Prioress Carmalita Murphy, 12 June 1992, Rose Haven Papers, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood; Sr. Carmelita Murphy to Sr. Barbara Hansen, 10 August 1992, Rose Haven Papers, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood; Pheterson, *The Prostitution Prism*, 30-36.
[244] As noted earlier, scientific evidence at the time did not demonstrate a connection between prostitution and the spread of the disease among heterosexuals. Given that the social status of prostitutes in the United States was one of illegitimacy, they were, therefore, fair game for scapegoating and attack. Pheterson, *The Prostitution Prism* 30-36.

intense controversy even further. Some MONA leaders, many of whom were lawyers in the Grand Rapids area, began investigating the Sisters' plans for other buildings on the campus, demanding to be part of the Sisters' decisions that determined the function of the buildings and the Sisters social justice projects on their campus.[245] The Sisters, who were committed to implementing their social justice ministries and to being good neighbors were surprised to find themselves in the unusual position of having to defend their religious lives and their ministries. They found themselves in the unfortunate position of being involved in a heated public dispute with the people they had lived peacefully alongside for decades.[246]

Seeking to implement the Rose Haven program in the context of their neighbors' growing opposition and swelling media attention the Sisters adjusted their strategy. Although they still held neighborhood meetings, sent out quarterly newsletters, and addressed their neighbors' concerns, they also began to assert their voices and their legal rights to use their property in ways they believed were consistent with their values and the Gospel's call to help marginalized members of the community.[247] In doing so they were also addressing, consciously or not, deeply rooted assumptions of Catholic Women Religious which the neighborhood and the media believed the Sisters should espouse.

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[245] Two MONA leaders, who were also lawyers, attempted to derail other projects the Sisters were implementing on their campus. President of MONA, Joseph Doele, was angry that the Sisters new Dominican Center, which provided meeting space and catering services to local organizations, without his knowledge and also demanded to know if the Sisters were going to remove the large oak trees along Lakeside Drive. "Mr. Joe Doele to Sr. Carmelita Murphy, November 25, 1992," Rose Haven File, Archives at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Lawyer Joe Martin, who also worked for the law firm that represented the Grand Rapids Diocese, for unknown reasons, searched for information regarding the legal status of Aquinata Hall. Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters Leadership Council Memorandum, December 9, 1992. Rose Haven File. Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.

[246] "Visioning to the Future: Future Use of the Marywood Complex, 1991."

[247] Vatican II's encyclicals dealing with social justice most directly are *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, 1965, *and Perfectae Caritatis,* (Decree on Adaptation and Renewal on Religious Life), 1965. *Gaudium et Spes,* recognized the dignity in every human and the need for the church to address injustice. *Perfectae Caritatis,* called on Religious to revise their ministries to be more relevant to the world.

Despite Marywood's lawyer arguing that the Sisters would not need a zoning variance to establish Rose Haven, the Grand Rapids Planning Department found that the "actual ingredient of that use (of the Lakeside Drive building) was the actual or close connection to the Dominican Order itself."[248] They concluded that the Lakeside Drive home's purpose as a congregate living structure *not directly connected* with the Dominican order was a function not permitted under the city's ordinances. In other words, the proposed purpose of the Rose Haven program was not seen as a ministry of the Dominican Sisters. City officials, therefore, argued that a variance to the current zoning law would be required before the Rose Haven program could be located in the Lakeside Drive building.[249]

Several contentious Zoning Board hearings in late 1992 and early 1993 followed after the Sisters decided to challenge the Zoning Board's decision that a variance was required. Members of the public, and even members of the Zoning Board, argued that the Marywood leaders should simply order Sisters who lived in private homes and apartments back to Marywood and force them to live in the Lakeside building.[250] This, they believed, would solve the problem of the empty Lakeside Drive building, but, of course, did not address the needs of the women trying to escape prostitution, or the Sisters' call to address injustices in their community. Arthur VanTol, member of the Zoning Board, however, questioned the motivation behind MONA and the neighbors' opposition to the Rose Haven program. MONA had argued that they were simply concerned about zoning laws and not *who* resided in the Lakeside Drive building. Mr. VanTol, in an exchange with the lawyer representing MONA, Arthur Spaulding, asked Spaulding, "All these changes (to the residents of the Lakeside Drive building prior to the Rose Haven controversy), have neighbors

[248] "William F. Hoyt, Planning Director to David L. Smith, September 17, 1992."
[249] Ibid.
[250] "Grand Rapids Zoning Appeal Hearing, November 5, 1992."

ever concerned themselves with the use of the building before?" Spaulding replied, "Probably not." VanTol, finished his exchange with Spaulding, stating that "I am mystified that with all these different uses and people coming and going out of the property for all these years, I guess you are asking me to believe all of a sudden three hundred of your closest friends and neighbors are all of a sudden completely involved in zoning law."[251]

By April 1993, after continued aggressive opposition to the Rose Haven program by MONA and their neighbors, the Sisters, in conjunction with the Good Shepherd Sisters, made the difficult decision to drop the Rose Haven program. Noting at their April Council meeting they made the decision because, "overall there was a sense that there is not an attitude of hospitality and receptivity present in MONA to welcome the Rose Haven program."[252] The Sisters were also concerned that "the women residents might not be treated in a hospitable manner by some residents of the neighborhood."[253] They also noted that, "while all parties present wish to remain steadfast in their commitment to justice, the need to deal realistically with the significant problems surrounding the possibility of hosting Rose Haven at Marywood," were also recognized.[254]

Despite this setback, by the following year the Sisters began formal discussions with the Salvation Army to house homeless women and their children in the Lakeside Drive building. This project, called Family Lodge, was opposed by MONA and a dozen neighbors, who launched a lawsuit to stop the Sisters from implementing the program. The majority of Marywood's neighbors, despite some neighbors lamenting that the women and children who would reside in the Family Lodge, "are not *our* kind," of people, supported the Sisters suggesting that *who* resided

[251] Ibid.
[252] Prioress and Council Meeting, April 27, 1993. Prioress Council Files, Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.

in the Lakeside Drive building was at the heart of the reason why so many neighbors opposed the Rose Haven program, rather than zoning issues.[255] It also suggests that *who* the Sisters helped mattered to the public as well. Assisting helpless women and children did not threaten the traditional sensibilities of what was expected of Women Religious and many neighbors noted how "honorable" the Sisters were in wanting to help the women.[256] The media, too, rather than focus on who would reside in the Lakeside Drive structure, pitted a group of seemingly heartless neighbors against Catholic Sisters who sought to help vulnerable women and children. For the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, they were not swayed to drop the Family Lodge program despite the scrutiny of some neighbors and their lawsuit. With the support of the majority of their neighbors, they moved ahead successfully fighting the lawsuit. The Family Lodge opened on September 18, 1995.

[255] "Dominican Sisters' Plans Favored by Many," *The Grand Rapids Press,* May 28, 1995; "Hearing Shows Neighbors' Division Over Shelter Plan: A Neighborhood Association is Against Having the Homeless Shelter at Marywood, While Other Residents Applaud the Sisters' Rezoning Efforts," *The Grand Rapids Press,* February 3, 1995.
[256] "Marywood Plan Targets Women, Kids," *The Grand Rapids Press,* February 2, 1995.

Fig. 2.5. Grand Opening ceremony of the Family Lodge, September 15, 1995. Prioress Barbara Hansen, center.[257]

Navigating Through the Controversy and Working for Justice

For the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, the controversy over desiring to help women in need was not the first time the Sisters had been criticized for stepping outside the boundaries of what the public, or the Catholic Church, had expected of them. Much of the public had clung to outdated concepts of religious womanhood in an attempt to define and confine the Sisters to honorable but narrow roles, usually those of compliant teachers and caregivers.[258] Elements of the twentieth-century Catholic Church, much of American society, and especially the media, continued to ascribe Catholic Women Religious with Victorian ideas of respectability,

[257] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.

[258] I define outdated concepts here as Pre-Vatican II and pre-Second Wave Women's Movement ideas about respectable behavior for women, and especially Women Religious, which largely expected women to be confined to the home (or convent in this case) and relegate their lives to caring for children, the elderly, and the infirm. See Rebecca Sullivan, *Visual Habits,* for the ways the public still ascribed to pre-Conciliar ideas of Women Religious and the ways pop culture perpetuated those ideas.

unquestioning compliance, naivety, and in some cases stupidity.[259] This idealized version of Women Religious did not sit well with many post-Vatican II Sisters, noting that, "we have strong 'Victorian lady concepts of the sister,' and that "the church looks upon (sisters) as minors and defines their conduct as though they were Victorian ladies designed for Victorian drawing rooms."[260] Rebecca Sullivan, in her study of Catholic Women Religious argues that "the nineteenth-century association of femininity with passivity and submissiveness had been anything but dispelled by the postwar era."[261] Catholic Sisters had been trying to shed these outdated ideas since the close of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

The Catholic Church's ideal role for women, even today, is rooted in the ideology of Complementarianism which rests on the premise that there is a "divinely ordained hierarchy with women playing a secondary and subordinate role to men." [262] This effectively functions to limit women's roles in the church and in society, with women's primary role as wives and mothers.[263] This was true even after the Second Vatican Council and the Second Wave Feminist Movement of the 1960s, which compelled the majority of Catholic Women Religious in the United States to jettison obsolete ideas of religious womanhood and expand their ministries well beyond teaching and nursing to engage with the pressing social issues of the day, no matter where those issues led them.[264]

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[259] Sullivan, *Visual Habits, 190.* Sullivan cites the Hollywood sitcom, "The Flying Nun," and others, as representations of Women Religious as "sickly sweet virgin(s)," if not simple-minded.
[260] Ibid, 19.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Nyasha Junior, "Beth Allison Barr's New Book: A Look into Complementarianism," *National Catholic Reporter,* June 5, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/beth-allison-barrs-new-book-look-complementarianism.
[263] Quiñonez, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters,* 93. Sullivan, *Visual Habits,* 3-21.
[264] Beth Allison Barr, in *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Ada, Mi.: Brazos Press, 2021) argues that "the modern version of complementarianism was invented in the twentieth century, in response to an increasingly effective feminist movement, to reinforce cultural gender divisions." "Beth Allison Barr's New Book: A Look into Complementarianism," *National Catholic Reporter,* June 5, 2021, https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/beth-allison-barrs-new-book-look-complementarianism. See also, Sullivan, *Visual Habits,* 6; Brekus, Catherine A. ed. *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2007), 241.

The controversy surrounding the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters and their social justice projects on their campus can be seen on one level as a conflict about who could and could not live in a mainly white middle-class neighborhood (NIMBYism) and who had the responsibility to care for those who could not care for themselves.[265] On a deeper level, however, it reflected how the public and the Sisters' neighbors grappled with the changed identities of Catholic Women Religious and their expanded social justice ministries since the close of Second Vatican Council nearly thirty years earlier. The majority of Catholic Women Religious, had, since the mid-1960s, adopted newer ideas of religious womanhood and embraced more modern ideas of governance, attire, living arrangements, and ministries. Their social justice programs in the late twentieth century reflected these changes and the Sisters' resolve to "meet the contemporary needs of everyday life," including assisting people society deemed unworthy of help.[266]

Historically, Catholic Nuns and Sisters have acted as "signifiers of moral certainty," and were seen as women committed to preserving moral values, especially sexual purity.[267] Despite centuries of working with the poorest and most marginalized segments of society, including

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[265]NIMBYism is defined as, "the protectionist attitudes of and oppositional tactics adopted by community groups facing an unwelcome development in their neighborhood." NIMBYism is an acronym for the "Not in My Back-Yard Syndrome." It is a phenomenon whereby residents, usually residing in white middle and upper-class neighborhoods, object to developments or changes to their neighborhood, such as subsidized housing developments for the poor or monitories, that would alter its homogenous status. Common arguments by those who oppose changes in their neighborhoods are increases in crime, litter, thefts, violence, and that property values will decrease. Any benefits to the neighborhood by proposed changes are usually ignored. See Benjamin Ross, *Dead End: Suburban Sprawl and the Rebirth of American Urbanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Michael Dear, "Understanding and Overcoming the NIMBY Syndrome," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 58, no. 3 (1999): 288-300; Joey Franklin, "Not in My Backyard," *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 61-75: John R. Logan and Gordan Rabrenovic, "Neighborhood Associations: Their Issues, Their Allies and Their Opponents," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (September 1990):68-94; Lilian Mathieu, "Neighbors' Anxieties Against Prostitutes' Fears: Ambivalence and Repression in the Policing of Street Prostitution in France," *Emotion, Space and Society* 4 (2011):113-120.
Michael Dear, "Understanding and Overcoming the NIMBY Syndrome," *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (1992), 288-300. See also, Peter Esaiasson, "NIMBYism—A Re-examination of the Phenomenon," *Social Science Research,* Vol. 48, (2014), 185-195); Benjamin Ross, *Dead End: Suburban Sprawl and the Rebirth of American Urbanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 88-103; Herbert Inhaber, *Slaying the Nimby Dragon,* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 1997), 1-12;
[266] Sullivan, 1.
[267] Ibid, 16.

working with and alongside prostitutes in rescue missions and in the cause of moral reform, Catholic Sisters were constantly held to standards meant to keep their reputations pure.[268] To witness, then, Catholic Women Religious, who for centuries had been heralded as the standard-bearers of morality, virtue, and sexual purity, affiliate with not only drug abusers and HIV-AIDS patients, but with street prostitutes, was not only scandalous and titillating, especially for the media, it was a massive jolt to the longstanding and comforting ideals of Women Religious which the public had clung.

Defining the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters as women who should imbue Victorian ideas of womanly propriety, as the neighborhood association attempted to do, conveyed to the public, and to city officials, the idea that the Sisters must shun ministries that served so-called disreputable and morally corrupt people. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, then, understood that they not only had to publicly defend their social justice projects, and the people they hoped to help, but also emphasize their own identities as faithful Catholic Women Religious who were also independent forward-thinking social justice activists.[269] In doing so they hoped to persuade their neighbors that their social justice projects were necessary and that they, as mature, highly educated women, were no longer exclusively bound to classrooms and hospitals but were called to serve people living on the margins of society.[270]

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[268] An example of society's attempt to protect Catholic Sisters' purity and reputations is when Aquinas College built three separate bathrooms for students and faculty members, for men, women, and Sisters in the mid-twentieth century. The Sisters joke that they were considered the "third sex." Interview with author, anonymous, November 2020.

[269] "News Release," November 5, 1992. Rose Haven Files, Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan. One method American Catholic Women Religious used to define themselves after the Second Vatican Council was to replace the monikers "Daughters" and "Brides of Christ," which implied lack of autonomy, with the more modern name, "Women Religious." American Catholic Women Religious also reverted to their Baptismal names, rather than their assigned names when they took religious vows. See Quiñonez, and Mary Turner, *The Transformation of American Catholic Sisters,* 88.

[270] Many Sisters continued the tradition of teaching and nursing but did so with extensive graduate degrees, often teaching at the college and university level and engaging in other social justice ministries.

Additionally, the Sisters found themselves defending the most basic personal choices: where they lived, whom they lived with, and how to utilize their private property. As noted in Chapter One, aggressive criticism regarding the behavior of Women Religious were not new to the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, or for Catholic Sisters in the United States generally. Despite centuries of navigating the shoals of the patriarchy of the Catholic Church, the situation with the Sisters at Marywood and their neighbors, however, was new to them. Even though the Bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids and the Grand Rapids ecumenical and civic community supported their new social justice programs aimed at helping HIV-AIDS patients, former prostitutes, and homeless women and children, the Sisters encountered an extremely powerful neighborhood association that was willing to bring the media into the fray to bolster their arguments against the Sisters' social justice initiatives. Primarily driven by NIMBYSM, Marywood's neighborhood association, Michigan Oaks Neighborhood Association (MONA), was led mainly by white middle-class male lawyers who employed a barrage of strategies, including bullying and attacking the Sisters identities to prevent the Sisters from implementing any social justice projects that they thought would endanger their neighborhood. MONA maintained that the social justice programs the Sisters proposed for their neighborhood would bring crime, drugs, violence, and lower property values. When arguing against Marywood's new social justice programs, however, they also claimed that the Sisters strayed from appropriate behaviors of Catholic Sisters. This tactic was an attempt to disgrace the Sisters and force them back into traditional identities and, therefore, roles of teaching and caregiving of young children or the elderly on the Marywood campus—ministries that would not endanger their neighborhood or property values.

The local, and then national media, drawn in by what they viewed as a titillating scandal of virginal nuns improperly associating with drug abusers, HIV-AIDS patients, and wayward

prostitutes, fanned the flames of the controversy further. A barrage of local newspaper articles, national newspapers, and national talk show hosts documented the Marywood-prostitute controversy.[271] Much of that coverage, as well as personal letters sent directly to the Sisters, relied on reifying the commonly used Madonna-Whore Dichotomy, classifying the Sisters and the former prostitutes into one of only two categories: virgin or whore. The *Los Angeles Times* reflected the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy in its December 13, 1992, headline, "Michigan Neighbors of Dominican Nuns Protest Efforts to Reform Fallen Angels," as did the *Wisconsin State Journal* with its headline, "Hookers in Convent Cause Stir."[272]This article, and many others like it, made much of celibate Catholic Sisters who desired to work with prostitutes, but also that the Sisters audaciously defended the dignity of women who provided sex to men in exchange for money. Confirming Vatican II's encyclical, *Gaudium et Spes,* which declared the dignity of all persons, the Sisters affirmed publicly that, "there's no difference between housing nuns and housing former prostitutes."[273] This statement was inevitably followed by a quote from the president of MONA, who fixated on the prostitutes' history of paid sexual work and the Sisters' virginal status, asserting

[271] Newspapers from as far away as Los Angeles, California and Honolulu, Hawaii, covered the controversy. "Michigan Neighbors of Dominican Nuns Protest Efforts to Reform Fallen Angels," *The Los Angeles Times,* December 13, 1992; "Hookers in Convent Cause Stir," *Wisconsin State Journal,* December 1, 1992; 'Nuns Opposed on Housing Ex-Hookers," *The Daily Times,* December 9, 1992; "House for Ex-Prostitutes Divides a Neighborhood," *Detroit Free Press,* December 3, 1992; "Neighbors Battling Nuns' Plans to Shelter Prostitutes," *The Spokesman Review,* December 1, 1992; "Nuns Opposed on Housing Ex-Hookers," *The South Bend Tribune,* December 1, 1992; "Nuns' Plans to Aid Prostitutes Draw Protests," *Intelligencer Journal,* December 1, 1992; "Neighbors Protest Nuns' Plan to Reform Prostitutes," *The Odessa American,* December 1, 1992; "Shelter for Ex-Prostitutes Riles Neighbors," *Lansing State Journal,* December 1, 1992; "Hookers in Convent Cause Stir," *Wisconsin State Journal,* December 1, 1992; "Neighbors Battling Nuns' Plan to Shelter Prostitute," *Spokesman Review,* December 1, 1992; "Neighbors Protest Nuns' Shelter Plans," *Tampa Tribune,* December 1, 1992; "Nuns Battle to Help Prostitutes Reform," *Times Herald,* December 1, 1992; "Nuns' Plan to Shelter Prostitutes Sirs Anger," *Fort Worth Star Telegram,* December 13, 1992.

[272] "Michigan Neighbors of Dominican Nuns Protest Efforts to Reform Fallen Angels," *The Los Angeles Times,* December 13, 1992; "Hookers in Convent Cause Stir," *Wisconsin State Journal,* December 1, 1992.

[273] "Michigan Neighbors of Dominican Nuns Protest Efforts to Reform Fallen Angels," *Los Angeles Times,* December 13, 1992. *Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)* Vatican, December, 1965.

that, “[T]he position that a nun is the same as a prostitute is an extraordinary argument that stretches the law and logic and the facts to the extreme.”[274]

Originally defined as the *Madonna-Whore Complex* by Freud, the Madonna-Whore dichotomy argued that some heterosexual men were unable to "view the 'tender' and 'sensual' dimensions of women's sexuality as united," but as opposing, leading to sexual dysfunction.[275] More recent feminist theorists, however, view the Madonna-Whore Complex as an ideology designed to reinforce patriarchy. It comprises two inter-related beliefs: one of opposing views that “women fit into one of two mutually exclusive types, Madonna or Whore,” and two, that men associate “sexual women with negative traits,” such as manipulation, lying, and cheating, and “chaste women with positive traits,” such as nurturance.[276] Feminist theorists argue that the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy “pressures women to follow the chaste path or be seen as unsuitable wives and mothers.” And if not wives and mothers then virginal Nuns and Sisters who were maternal figures, not physically giving birth to children of course, but nurturing and educating children, nonetheless, remaining solidly in the confines of the Madonna sphere.[277]

Other newspaper articles, and especially personal letters from their neighbors sent directly to the Sisters, revealed the Madonna-Whore dichotomy as Marywood neighbors expressed revulsion that the Sisters had stepped away from their identities as proper Women Religious. MONA board member, James Beray, complained that the Dominican Sisters had lost their religious identity, “and they are kind of groping for what they want to do . . .”[278] Neighbors Mr. and Mrs. Robert J. Syrek, thought the Sisters had stepped too far outside the boundaries of

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[274] Ibid.
[275] Orly Baraket, et al., “The Madonna-Whore Dichotomy: Men Who Perceive Women’s Nurturance and Sexuality as Mutually Exclusive Endorse Patriarchy and Show Lower Relationship Satisfaction,” *Sex Roles,* 79 (2018), 5-19-532.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.
[278] “Plan for Shelter Unsettles Neighbors,” *Grand Rapids Press,* February 3, 1995.

appropriate behavior for Women Religious by engaging in American capitalism, claiming that the Sisters were not really interested in the welfare of HIV-AIDS patients or prostitutes but only renting out Marywood property to make money.[279] Pressuring the Sisters to continue their ministry of educating children, the Syreks ended their highly charged letter with the exclamation: "KEEP YOUR DIGNITY!"[280]

Most newspaper headlines played with the religious identity of the Marywood Sisters and the sexual identity of the prostitutes. Headlines such as, "Higher Calling at Marywood," "The Lure of Nuns and Prostitutes," or, "Panel Likes Sisters' Act For Homeless Women," playing off the popular 1992 movie starring Whoopi Goldberg, were common and set the Sisters apart from lay and secular social justice activists.[281] The Coffee Dunkers of America, an ad hoc assemblage of politicians, lawyers, media figures, and other leaders in Grand Rapids, gathered each December for their annual satirical show to raise money for local charities. During their December 1992 show, organizers poked fun at the Marywood Sisters for their desire to rehabilitate former prostitutes. An image in *The Grand Rapids Press* pictures local celebrities, imitating fully habited Marywood Sisters, standing in front of three men who are aping MONA leaders. The men, pictured with their hands over the "Nuns" mouths are presumably trying stop the Sisters from speaking

[279] Far from making a profit on the rental of the Lakeside Drive building, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters had agreed to rent the Lakeside Drive building to the Good Shepherd Sisters for a nominal fee of $1.00 a year.
[280] Letter from Mr. and Mrs. Syrek, June 12, 1992. Marywood Archives, Rose Haven files. While most MONA neighbors opposed the social justice projects aimed at HIV-AIDS patients, former prostitutes, and homeless women and children, some were publicly supportive of the Sisters.
[281] The Second Vatican Council had clearly dismantled the centuries-long hierarchies that separated lay vowed Religious from lay Catholics and redefined Religious Men and Women as people who were no better spiritually than lay people. "Higher Calling at Marywood," *The Grand Rapids Press,* December 2, 1992; "The Lure of Nuns and Prostitutes," *The Grand Rapids Press,* December 19, 1992; *Sister Act*, Directed by Emile Ardolin (Touchstone Pictures, 1992).

Doughnuts are stale but humor is fresh as Dunkers do it again

By Doug Guthrie
The Grand Rapids Press

The Coffee Dunkers of America served up more than its traditional menu of stale doughnuts and irreverent lampooning at today's renewal of its annual charity roast.

The cast of satiric players also paid serious tribute to retiring Kent County Clerk Maurice DeJonge and the work of Camp O'Malley. About 400 people gathered at 7:29 a.m. in Grand Valley State University's Eberhard Center for the skits and tributes.

A special tribute was made to DeJonge and in exception to the rule that no topic is sacred, no comments out of bounds – the Dunkers posted one of their charities as off limits.

Even former President Gerald Ford got into the comedic act, in a videotaped presentation deliberately poorly faked as though he were speaking live from his home in California.

He clumsily pretended to dunk a doughnut and said experts have told him he probably would have won the election in 1976 if only he'd disallowed his association with the Dunkers.

"I did dunk in the past," Ford deadpanned, "but I never swallowed."

Ford went on to introduce his old friend DeJonge.

The former Grand Rapids Press reporter who left for appointment and subsequent election to the job, sang an altered form of "Thanks For The Memories." DeJonge's version included thanks to his former boss at The Press for making him so miserable that he would quit to take the clerk's job.

Youth Commonwealth Inc.'s Camp O'Malley actually was the target of rare Dunker praise. A state attorney general's investigation recently concluded the police-related youth activity organization had a sloppy financial past but not a criminal one.

The Dunkers helped organize a radiothon that raised enough money last summer to rescue camp operations.

"I know this is uncharacteristically serious," Dunker James Booth Burr said searching for an excuse. "It was a serious situation and something that bothered an awful lot of people. Camp O'Malley has been a Dunker charity since its funding and many organizations and individuals came out to help."

see DUNKERS, B2

PRESS PHOTO/DELBRIDGE LANGDON JR.

Poking fun at a proposal to rehabilitate prostitutes at the former Marywood Academy are, left to right, Joel Boyden, Suzanne Geha, Terry Fenech, Cynthia Kay, Dr. John Beernink and Susan Heartwell.

Fig. 2.6. Newspaper article from *The Grand Rapids Press* reporting on the Coffee Dunkers fund-raising show. Local celebrities are seen dressed as Marywood Sisters and neighborhood leaders "poking fun at a proposal to rehabilitate prostitutes."[282]

publicly about the sexually charged issues surrounding the Rose Haven controversy. The Coffee Dunkers, by ensuring that their "nuns" were dressed in habits reflected the ways the media struggled with seeing Catholic Women Religious outside the boundaries of a convent working with sex workers.[283]

When the Grand Rapids Press and other newspapers included photographs of the Sisters in their coverage of the controversy, even when the article or editorial supported the Sisters and their social justice projects, the images were inevitably of the small number of Sisters who still wore habits. This simply reinforced the older ideas of Catholic Women Religious and ignored Sisters who chose more modern identities and their new social justice projects. Using the Madonna-Whore Dichotomy also provided cover for the neighborhood association's NIMBYISM and MONA's

[282] Doug Guthrie, "Doughnuts are stale but humor is fresh as Dunkers do it again," *The Grand Rapids Press,* December 14, 1992.
[283] Ibid.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 1992

METRO

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Marywood loses round; needs zoning variance

By Kelley Root
The Grand Rapids Press

Local Dominican nuns will have to keep fighting if they want to house former prostitutes at the Marywood Academy, the city's Zoning Board of Appeals ruled Thursday.

In a decision one member called "emotionally wrenching," the board told the Grand Rapids Dominicans they cannot establish the controversial Rose Haven program in a residential Northeast Side neighborhood without a zoning variance.

Sister Carmelita Murphy, prioress of the order, said the sisters will decide within about a week whether to seek the variance.

"I am not terribly surprised," she said. "It was a very difficult matter for the board to consider."

The zoning board voted 7-2 to uphold a ruling by city planning staff that the sisters need special permission to house up to 10 former prostitutes and their children in a former rectory at 143 Lakeside Drive NE. The Marywood campus is in a single-family residential zone, which is the most restrictive in the city.

"This has been, without question, the most difficult, time-consuming and emotionally wrenching decision this body has ever had to deal with," Board of Appeals Chairman Rodney VanTol said.

The board had been asked to decide only whether the variance was necessary, not to approve or reject the proposed new use of the building. The Dominicans now may approach the board for a variance at any time.

The sisters' proposal has raised questions about what kind of activities should be considered religious for zoning purposes. It also drew fire from neighbors, who claim that housing former prostitutes is far different than housing members of the clergy.

"I commend the board members who ... had the courage to stay within the parameters of the zoning code and stay away from the social issues," said Joseph Doele, president of the Michigan Oaks Neighborhood Association.

About 500 MONA members have signed a petition opposing Rose Haven as a zoning violation. Though many praise the program,

see ZONING, C4

PRESS PHOTO/REX D. LARSEN

Marywood nuns, from left, Sisters Mary Alice McDonald, Yvonne Richards and Letitia Van Agtmael attend Zoning Board of Appeals hearing.

Fig. 2.7. *The Grand Rapids Press* news articles, such as the one pictured above, inevitably included photos of the Sisters who still wore habits.[284]

argument that the Sisters should drop their projects and that the prostitutes should be housed somewhere else.[285]

MONA's leaders, neighbors, and some city officials, also demanded that Marywood leadership force the Sisters who lived off campus to move back to Marywood, attempting to limit the autonomy and the ministries of the Dominican Sisters. MONA leader and lawyer, Joe Martin, obtained an official Marywood address book which contained confidential information about the Sisters, such as the names, birthdates, ministries, and addresses of all the Sisters.[286] He used this private information to build a case against the Sisters arguing that Sisters who lived off campus in private homes and apartments should be ordered back to the campus and occupy the building where the rehabilitation home was to be located, thus, preventing the prostitutes from moving in. When

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[284] Kelley Root, "Marywood loses round; needs zoning variance," *The Grand Rapids Press,* December 4, 1992.
[285] Regardless of the types of arguments MONA used against the social justice programs the Dominican Sisters, the Sisters' identities—as Women Religious straying from appropriate roles—were almost always at the forefront of those arguments.
[286] It is unknown who provided Mr. Martin with the directory, but some suspect that a disgruntled Sister, who had long resisted the changes that Vatican II brought to the Congregation, provided the directory. Interview with author, anonymous, September 2018.

Prioress Carmelita Murphy requested he give the address book back, he refused, stating that it was "inappropriate for you to insist," he return it.[287]

In an unusually strongly worded letter from the Prioress Murphy to Martin, she reminded him of how she and the congregation had long worked with him "in a collaborative attitude," and "spirit of mutual respect," but that, "Quite frankly, how we Dominicans organize our common life is none of your business."[288] He responded three days later in a letter stating that, "It manifestly is the business of your neighbors" because the Sisters were asking that one of their buildings be used as a rehabilitation home.[289] Then, attempting to control the Sisters further, he demanded to know detailed statistical information on the living arrangements of the Sisters, such as the number of Sisters in their order, the number who resided in Grand Rapids in private homes and apartments, the number in Aquinata Hall, (the Sisters nursing center), the number of Sisters who lived in other convents, and the reasons for such living arrangements. Sister Murphy did not comply with his request and refused to meet with Martin until he returned the directory and "extend goodwill and mutual respect," to the congregation.[290]

Other MONA members insisted that the Sisters should convert the building that was to house prostitutes and homeless women and children into a Bed and Breakfast or an educational facility for children, not only suggesting that they believed they could dictate how the Sisters use their private property, but also limit the Sisters to the time-honored domestic role of caring for children. The mayor of Grand Rapids, John Logie, even suggested the Sisters allow him to form an advisory board which would review and evaluate "uses of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters'

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[287] Joseph Martin to Sr. Carmelita Murphy, Prioress, September 25, 1992. Rose Haven File, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives.
[288] Letter from Prioress Carmelita Murphy to Joseph Martin, September 25, 1992.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Letter from Prioress Carmelita Murphy to Joseph Martin, October 1, 1992. Rose Haven File, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives.

Fulton Street property." The advisory board would review "proposed uses for which a variance or land use approval is required," and that "a recommendation of the advisory board would be sought before proceeding with a variance request." Per the Mayor's suggestion, the advisory board would consist of five "community leaders who reside in the Michigan Oaks neighborhood, one MONA board member or designee," and one member of Marywood's leadership council.[291] This suggestion, the Sisters did not take up.

In an attempt to control the narrative surrounding the controversy and correct "misinformation and misunderstandings about Rose Haven, and about the Grand Rapids Dominicans," the Sisters released a news release and sent their neighbors firmly worded newsletter in November, 1992. The Sisters addressed misperceptions ranging from falling property values to the Sisters lease arrangement with the Rose Haven program. They also addressed the neighbors' perception of how Women Religious ought to live and their autonomy in choosing for themselves how and where to live by stating that,

> The Grand Rapids Dominicans choose from a variety of living (residential options), Including living in parish convents or apartments near their ministries or living in small groups in houses or apartments. The current renovation of Marywood will include two floors of approximately 12,000 square feet to house Sisters in 10 one-to-two-bedroom apartments. Therefore, the two main buildings on the campus will offer our Sisters of institutional living for 120 women, and another 24 Sisters will have the option of smaller, more autonomous housing. We do not choose to renovate the 143 Lakeside residence for Sisters' living because we believe it is more important to serve the mission of the Congregation by providing transitional housing for some women and children.[292]

In their press release, dated November 5, 1992 they also addressed the misperception their neighbors held that "the Grand Rapids Dominicans are dying or that we are dead." Noting, "God forbid! Religious life . . . is an ever-evolving way of life," and that they had lived in various places

[291] The Sisters did not follow through with the Mayor's suggestion. Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters Memorandum, February 8, 1993. Rose Haven File. Archives of Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[292] "Grand Rapids Dominicans' Communicator," November 16, 1996. Rose Haven File. Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.

since moving to Michigan, and that "We live now in a different time and we are redesigning this facility to meet the needs of these times and the coming decade."[293] They also pointed out where many of the misperceptions and misunderstanding were coming from by noting the "three-page handout to 780 households," which depicted the Sisters as "attempting to manipulate our neighborhood and the City of Grand Rapids," and that contrary to MONA's arguments that the Sisters refuse to meet with their neighbors, they have "hosted three public meetings," and "initiated a newsletter to 780 households commencing in August of this year."

Sister Barbara Hansen, O.P., sensed that the neighbors were intent on not only preventing the establishment of a rehabilitation home for women in crisis on the grounds of Marywood, but were, in effect, attempting to control the Sisters' autonomy, lifestyle, and even identities. She noted in a communication with Marywood's leadership team that she was concerned that their neighbors, rather than they, would determine Marywood's ministries. Reflecting the Grand Rapids Dominicans resolve to live accordingly to *their* concepts of religious life, and not their neighbors, Hansen responded succinctly to pressures by the neighborhood association to force all the Sisters living in private homes and apartments to move back to the campus by stating that, "The day is gone when Mother (Mother Superior) says, come home."[294] Summarizing the Sisters' resolve to address injustices in Grand Rapids, Grand Rapids Commissioner George Heartwell wrote later that the newly established Family Lodge for homeless women and children,

> . . . draws its significance not only from the fact that families in need will continue to be served in an environment that dignifies them, but from its witness to perseverance and faith in the face of vitriolic opposition. Throughout the course of this rezoning effort . . . you never lost your vision for this facility, nor did you descend to the level of rhetoric chosen by your neighborhood opponents.[295]

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[293] "New Release," Grand Rapids Dominicans. Rose Haven File, Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominicans Sisters at Marywood.
[294] "Plan for Shelter Unsettles Neighbors," *The Grand Rapids Press,* February 3, 1995.
[295] George Heartwell to Prioress Barbara Hansen, September 11, 1995.

Conclusion

From initiating petition drives, sending aggressive letters laced with legalese, to launching lawsuits, and hurling accusations at the Sisters as being "duplicitous and uncooperative" women who were stepping outside the boundaries of appropriate behavior for Women Religious, MONA attempted to define who the Sisters were, who they should be, what ministries they could and could not enact, and even dictate where the Sisters should live. The Sisters, however, firmly believed in the relevance of their ministries, the social teaching of the Catholic Church that compelled them to help marginalized people, and their right to determine how and where they lived and what social justice projects they established. While they ultimately had to drop the plan for the rehabilitative home for prostitutes because of the hostility of their neighbors, in the end they were able establish the Family Lodge transitional shelter for homeless women and children. In their struggles to establish a home for marginalized women and children, and not bow to their neighbors' demands to revert back to pre-Conciliar roles of Women Religious, are sites in which we can locate feminist agency of Catholic Women Religious.

CHAPTER THREE. SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES: GRAND RAPIDS DOMINICANS AND THE UNITED STATES ANTI-NUCLEAR AND ANTI-WAR MOVEMENTS

On October 6, 2002, nearly one year to the day after the start of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, three Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters Ardeth Platte, Carol Gilbert, and Jackie Hudson, broke into an N8 Minuteman III Missile compound in northeast Colorado.[296] The Colorado site, located on a windswept hill in the eastern plains of Weld County, some 60 miles north of Denver, was protected only by security cameras and a simple chain-link fence.[297] Using everyday bolt cutters to break the chain that held the perimeter fence together, the sisters walked towards the missile silo unhindered. In a press release prepared for that day, the trio stated that they broke into the nuclear compound to "inspect, expose and symbolically disarm this weapon of mass destruction to avert a crime of our government."[298] In addition, the Sisters, who resided in Jonah House, a small community of nonviolent antinuclear weapons activists in Baltimore, Maryland, sought to highlight what they alleged was blatant hypocrisy on the part of the United States: its own possession of nuclear weapons while it sought to eradicate the nuclear capacity of other select countries in the Middle East. The sisters remarked finally that their action was meant to highlight

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[296] N8 is "a concrete rocket silo that houses forty-nine rockets, each with twenty-five times the explosive force of the Hiroshima bomb." Rosalie G. Riegle, *Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family and Community* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 134.

[297] Remote "Visual Assessment" security cameras were only installed at Minutemen sites after September 11, 2001. Despite peace activists' ability to access Minutemen sites, it would be extremely difficult to break into the underground bunkers and get near the missiles, but it is not impossible. The silo doors are made from over a hundred tons of reinforced steel and concrete. One would have to access the underground entry and get past the seven-ton steel plug to access the hatch, which requires a code and then another code to move the plug. Once inside, even a highly skilled technician would have difficulty launching Minuteman missiles and detonating a warhead. Despite these safeguards, and specialists explain the "the detonation of a nuclear weapon would be the most difficult type of nuclear terrorism to achieve," fears regarding an attack on the United States nuclear arsenal have only escalated after the September 11, 2001 attack and the increased domestic terrorism of the last twenty years. The ability of Plowshares activists to break into American nuclear weapons bases and storage facilities only underscores these fears. Eric Schlosser, "Break-in at Y-12: How a Handful of Pacifists and Nuns Exposed the Vulnerability of America's Nuclear Weapons Sites," *The New Yorker*; March 9, 2015, 9-10.

[298] *Conviction,* directed by Brenda Truelson Fox, (Los Angeles, CA: Zero to Sixty Productions, 2006), DVD. Eric Schlosser, 5; Three Sisters from Sacred Earth and Plowshares Arrested at N-8 Missile Silo Near Greeley: Press Release," DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Collection on Peace Activism, Series 009: Sister Ardeth Platte and Sister Gilbert Papers, Box 010, File 009.

the connection between American militarism and social injustice, "as billions of dollars are spent on weapons programs that could otherwise be invested in education and social services" for the poor and dispossessed.[299]

After entering the missile compound, the sisters unfurled a peace banner, sang hymns, and recited a prayer.[300] Next, they poured their own blood, in the form of a cross, on top of the concrete casing of the missile. The blood, drawn earlier by physicians, was held in baby bottles and symbolized children killed by wars.[301] The use of symbols, especially using their own blood to deface nuclear weapons and facilities, can seem more theatrical than political; it also can be off-putting to some of the public. In her study of the Plowshares movement, Sharon Nepstad remarks that the deep symbolism of the activists' blood is "powerful," but "also subject to multiple interpretations," and that "activists' intended meaning may not be clear."[302] As a result, Plowshare's activists explain their symbolic actions regularly. The meaning behind symbols varies from activist to activist as well. For example, the use of blood typically represents the death of innocent civilians in wars, especially children, if contained in baby bottles. For some activists, there is additional meaning deriving from the sacrifice of Christ's crucifixion and his resurrection. That with human work nuclear weapons can "die" and the world "resurrected" from the death and

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[299] From 1940 to 1996, the United States spent almost $5.5 trillion on nuclear weapons and programs. This number, however, is a conservative number as the government "has never tried to track all nuclear weapons costs either annually or over time and as a result, records in this regard are extremely spotty and in numerous instances non-existent." Stephen I. Schwartz, "The Hidden Costs of Our Nuclear Arsenal: Overview of Project Findings," June 30, 1998, https://www.brookings.edu/the-hidden-costs-of-our-nuclear-arsenal-overview-of-project-findings/.
The Congressional Budget Office reports that "[i]f carried out, the plans for nuclear forces delineated in the Department of Defense's (DoD's) and the Department of Energy's (DOE's) fiscal year 2021 budget requests, submitted in February 2020, would cost a total of $634 billion over the 2021-2030 period, for an average of just over $60 billion a year." The Congressional Budget Office, https://www.cbo.gov/publication/57240. "Martha Stewart is Totally Against the War in Iraq, Says Activist Nun Imprisoned with Her," Democracynow.org, May 27, 2005; Nepstand, Sharon Erickson. *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.
[300] Truelson, *Conviction*.
[301] Ibid. See Sharon Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[302] Nepstad, 10.

destruction of nuclear weapons. Blood also symbolizes the personal sacrifice of an activist who may spend years in prison as a result of his or her actions—a costly sacrifice indeed for a political protest.[303]

Invoking the Biblical passage from the book of Isaiah, "And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore,"[304] the Sisters took hammers to the top of the silo, symbolically "destroying" the weapon, although in fact doing little damage to its 110-ton concrete casing. Presuming they would be arrested shortly after their arrival, the Sisters still had to wait an hour before military security arrived.[305] Driving their Humvees over the fence, rather than through the gate the Sisters had opened, military security found the Sisters quietly praying and arrested them, placing the women in handcuffs.[306] When security personnel asked the sisters what they were doing to the missile site, Sister Gilbert replied that they were simply following President George W. Bush's recent call to dismantle weapons of mass destruction.[307] The three Dominicans named their antinuclear weapons protest, "Sacred Earth and Space Plowshares II," after their antinuclear weapons action

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[303] Nepstad, 10.
[304] Isaiah, 2:4,
[305] By getting arrested activists drew more attention to their cause. Rubinson, *Rethinking the Antinuclear Movement,* 131; Waiting a lengthy period of time to be arrested was a common experience among Plowshares activists. Because of Plowshares protests, especially the action at the Y-12 uranium storage facility in West Virginia in 2009, and others including the Sacred Earth and Space II Plowshares actions, the federal government drew substantial criticism for its lax security at the dozens of sites that dot the rural landscape in the United States. This was particularly true after the attack against the United States on September 11, 2001. See especially Eric Schlosser, "Break-In At Y-12: How a Handful of Pacifists and Nuns Exposed the Vulnerability of America's Nuclear Weapons Sites*." The New Yorker,* March 9, 2015.
[306] This detail is important to note. The three Sisters were charged an exorbitant amount of money to repair the damage that they had inflicted to the site. They argued that the damages, a broken chain and paint to cover up the blood they spilled, was in no way equal to the thousands of dollars the federal government wanted them to pay.
[307] This was in reference to George W. Bush's arguments throughout September and early October 2002 that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and possibly the ability to make nuclear weapons, reasons he gave for invading Iraq. See "President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly, September 12, 2002, https://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html.

Fig. 3.1. Sisters Gilbert and Hudson attaching a peace banner on the fence surrounding the N8 Minuteman III Nuclear Weapons site, in Colorado, October 6, 2002.[308]

two years earlier at Peterson Airforce Base in Colorado Springs, and the plowshares reference to Isaiah, which gave their pacifist community in Baltimore its name.[309] The Sisters' action was part of the Plowshares Movement, a pacificist movement whose members "engage in property destruction to resist the escalating nuclear arms race."[310] Plowshare's actions, by way of entering restricted spaces and destroying federal property, are illegal. Plowshare's activists, including Sisters Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson, were willing to accept the consequences of these illegal actions, and were almost always brought to trial and found guilty, serving prison sentences from several months to many years.[311] Sisters Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson's action resulted in the United

[308] Photo courtesy of Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives.
[309] Peterson Airforce Base is now called Peterson Space Force Base. Plowshares actions are given names in the same way that the United States' names its military operations. Eric Schlosser, "Break-in at Y-12," *The New Yorker*; March 9, 2015, 5. "Three Sisters from Sacred Earth and Plowshares Arrested at N-8 Missile Silo Near Greeley: Press Release," DePaul University Special Collections and Archives, Collection on Peace Activism, Series 009: Sister Ardeth Platte and Sister Gilbert Papers, Box 010, File 009.
[310] Nepstad, xvi.
[311] Ibid.

States Justice Department prosecuting the trio for violent crimes, sabotage, and threatening national security. The Sisters were sentenced to lengthy terms in federal prison. Sisters Gilbert and Platte were subsequently labeled suspected terrorists in their home state of Maryland by the Maryland State Police.[312]

While not the first time Gilbert, Hudson, and Platte had been arrested and imprisoned for acts of civil disobedience, nor would it be their last, the Sacred Earth and Space Plowshares II action landed the Sisters their longest prison terms and garnered them much more media attention than their previous actions. The attack on the United States on September 11 the previous year, and the impending invasion in Iraq by the United States, heightened the federal government's scrutiny towards radical antiwar activists and furthered the attention of the media on the Sisters' arrest in Colorado. As was the case with Marywood's Rose Haven and Salvation Army Family Lodge controversies, the media and the public were transfixed, not necessarily by antiwar activists protesting nuclear weapons and the impending war in Iraq, but by the stories and images of Catholic Women Religious going to prison not only for willfully breaking the law but for doing so in provocative ways which many people found perplexing if not appalling, especially the use of blood in their acts of civil disobedience.[313] Despite criticism the Sisters received because of their social justice actions and their lengthy prison terms they believed in their faithfulness to the Gospels which called them to be peacemakers.[314] They believed in the Gospels which called them

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[312] Plowshare's members, including Sisters Platte and Gilbert, use the term "civil resistance," rather than "civil disobedience," when describing their antinuclear weapons actions to distinguish between what they believe to be just and unjust laws. They argue that the Gospels call them to "resist" the laws that are unjust by protest, civil resistance, and even imprisonment. Truelson, *Conviction*; Nepstand, 1. Author interview with Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert, May 10, 2019. The charges of "terrorist" were rescinded after a public outcry. I was extremely fortunate to interview Sisters Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert a year before Sister Platte passed away. Sister Jackie Hudson passed away at the age of 76 in August 2011.

[313]Direct action against nuclear weapons entered the mainstream antinuclear movement in the 1980s, "Just as the mainstream antinuclear movement reached new levels of political influence. Paul Rubinson, *Rethinking the American Antinuclear Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 130.

[314] See especially, Matthew 5:9.

to be peacemakers, and they were willing to face criticism, arrests, and lengthy prison sentences to bring about a more just world.

Sisters Hudson, Gilbert, and Platte's record of social justice activism and acts of civil disobedience is vast and diverse, spanning decades of work in many areas. It cannot, however, be sufficiently examined in one chapter. What follows, here, is an examination of the evolution of their anti-nuclear and anti-war activism. Their activism is also a testament to the lengths to which the Sisters went in the cause of social justice.

A Brief History of Catholic Women in the Antinuclear Weapons Movement

Many histories of the American antinuclear weapons movement use a broad brush to describe its participants, "emphasizing commonalities between all sorts of antinuclear activists."[315] The antinuclear weapons movement was not, however, a monolithic movement. It is important to recognize its great diversity in order to understand the disparate motivations, "tactics, priorities, and rhetoric" of its activists.[316] Some antinuclear weapons activists were drawn to the movement out of fear that a nuclear World War III might be triggered; others were drawn to the movement because of the environmental hazards the production of nuclear weapons created, or the accidents that spread radiation over their communities. Others—like Sisters Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson—were drawn to the movement not just because of the weapons' potential to destroy nations and

[315] Rubinson, Paul. *Rethinking the American Antinuclear Movement,* New York: Routledge, xii. For more on the antinuclear weapon movement, see: Kyle Harvey, *American Anti-Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Disarmament Movement,* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Milton Katz, *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Paul Boyer, "From Activism to Apathy: the American People and Nuclear Weapons, 1963-1980," *Journal of American History,* Vol. 70, No. 4, (March, 1984): 821-844; William Knoblauch, *Nuclear Freeze in a Cold War: The Reagan Administration, Cultural Activism, and the End of the Arms Race* (Amherst, Mass.: Massachusetts Press, 2017); Jeffrey Knopf, *Domestic Society and International Cooperation: The Impact of Protest on U.S. Arms Control Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); John Lofland, *Polite Protestors: The American Peace Movement of the 1980* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994); Lawrence Wittner, *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1933-1983* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

[316] Rubinson, xii.

pollute the environment, but because these activists believed that the possession of nuclear weapons was and is one of the most important social justice issues of our day. The expense of producing and maintaining nuclear weapons, they argued, amounting to billions of dollars a year in the United States alone, contributed to the poverty of minorities, caused poor health of the many Americans living near nuclear production facilities, and stimulated a never-ending culture of violence in American society.[317]

Scholars who examine radical Catholic activists in the antinuclear weapons movement in the United States tend to neglect the role of women in the movement, relegating them "to the fringes of the peace movement."[318] Most scholars, when discussing radical Catholic activists of the 1980s, focus on the Berrigan brothers, their Catonsville Nine action, and their subsequent arrest and imprisonment. Women Religious are rarely given a nod in these histories, apart from their role supporting male activists.[319] There are a few exceptions, such as Sister Elizabeth McAlister, who is often given a privileged place in these narratives. I argue, however, that the role that McCallister plays in these histories, especially in the early years of her activism, largely centers on her marriage to Phil Berringer, when she and Phil still belonged in their religious orders and sparked a scandal within the Church and community, and not necessarily on her own rich history of radical activism.

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[317] On the economic and social cost of nuclear weapons, see: "Making Economic Case for Disarmament, First Committee Delegates Issue Calls to Trim Soaring Military Budgets, Reinvest Funds in Vital 2020 Agenda," United Nations, October 9, 2018, https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/gadis3598.doc.htm; Peter J. Hoetz, "Nuclear Weapons and Neglected Diseases: The 'Ten-Thousand-One Gap,'" *PLoS Neglected Tropical Diseases,* Vol. 4, No. 4, (April 2010), 1-8; "Enough is Enough: Global Nuclear Weapons Spending 2019," ICAN, May, 2020, https://www.icanw.org/report_73_billion_nuclear_weapons_spending_2020; "Nuclear Spending Versus Healthcare," ICAN, undated, https://www.icanw.org/healthcare_costs.

[318] This is true for most histories of the movement whether the subjects are Religious or not. Rubinson, xiii.

[319] Sister Elizabeth McAlister is an exception and given a privileged place in the histories of the Catholic Left for her own lengthy history of radical activism and prison sentences, but also, I argue, though, it is largely because of her connection with Phili Berrigan whom she married while she and Berrigan were still in religious orders. The Vatican subsequently excommunicated both. See especially: Murray Poiner and Jim O'Grady, *Disarmed and Dangerous: The Radical Lives and Times of Daniel and Philip Berrigan* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Patricia McNeal, *Harder Than War: Catholic Peacemaking in Twentieth Century America* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Charles Meconis, *With Clumsy Grace: The American Catholic Left, 1961-1975* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979).

A significant number of Women Religious participated in the antinuclear weapons movement during its sixty plus years of existence.[320] It is not, in fact, an exaggeration to argue that the vast majority of Women's religious orders in the United States support the movement, at least nominally by way of policies opposing the production and usage of nuclear weapons.[321] As a consequence, it is important to put Women Religious into the historical narrative as full, independent participants, not simply as supporters of secular activists or male religious leaders. Catholic Women Religious brought distinct motivations and tactics and often the support of their entire congregation to the movement. They further encouraged their vast networks to connect to the movement adding to the movement's numbers. Their faith, which was the mainstay of the motivational factors bringing Women Religious to the movement, intersected with their social justice sensibilities. The women wanted to see the world rid of the dangers that nuclear weapons presented.

Further, as members of religious communities of like-minded women, Women Religious in the antinuclear movement were supported in ways in which secular activists were not.[322] This support allowed activist sisters to focus on the movement in ways that other women, who had additional responsibilities of careers and families, simply could not do. Sisters Gilbert and Platte, for example, were able to have a full-time vocation dedicated to anti-nuclear activism because of the support of their fellow Dominican Sisters. In my interview with Sisters Gilbert and Platte, they

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[320] On Women Religious in the antinuclear weapons movement, see: Kristen Tobey, *Plowshares: Protest, Performance, and Religious Identity in the Nuclear Age* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016.

[321] "Public Statement of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious: Opposition to the War in Iraq and the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," Leadership Conference of Women Religious, August 29, 2005, https://lcwr.org/news/public-statement-of-the-leadership-conference-of-women-religious-opposition-to-the-war-in-iraq; "Scientists and Catholic Leaders Call on President Biden to Work for a World Free of Nuclear Threat," Dominican Life, USA, May 26, 2021, https://domlife.org/category/public-statements/.

[322] See, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement,* (Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Eric Schlosser, "Break-In At Y-12: How a Handful of Pacifists and Nuns Exposed the Vulnerability of America's Nuclear Weapons Sites," *The New Yorker,* March 9, 2015.

both remarked that they would not be able to work for the abolition of nuclear weapons without the sustained emotional, spiritual, and financial support from their congregation, nor would they grant me an interview unless I understood the community of women that surrounded them and their work.[323] For these Dominican Sisters, their activism was not *their* work, but the work of the entire congregation. The support they received from the congregation, and other supporters, especially when they were imprisoned, often sustained them through many difficult months behind bars.[324]

Many scholars have questioned the efficacy of the antinuclear war movement, and some have argued that it was deterrence, not the pressure of activists and the public opinion they engaged, that prevented a country from launching a nuclear missile.[325] The typical narrative contends that the United States and the Soviet Union, realizing that each nation possessed enough nuclear weapons to destroy the world several times over, would never commit to launching a nuclear missile as long as there was mutual assured destruction, subsequently keeping the peace.[326] Other scholars have moved away from this argument, contending that the antinuclear movement did indeed have an impact on nuclear weapons policy.[327] Historian Angela Santese argues that the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign's (NWFC) pressured U.S. public opinion and Congress to the point of "inducing Reagan first to temper his bellicose rhetoric and then to alter his negotiating

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[323] Support came in a variety of ways, from financial to moral support, to writing letters while Sisters were in prison.
[324] Interview with author, May 2019.
[325] Ronald Powaski, "The Antinuclear Movement Was Effective—But Not Completely," *Diplomatic History,* Vol. 23, No. 4 (Fall 1999): 711-714.
[326] Ibid. For work on Mutually Assured Destruction, see: Edward Kaplan, *To Kill Nations: American Strategy in the Air-Atomic Age and the Rise of Mutually Assured Destruction* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2-015);
[327] See, for example, Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb,* volume 1, *One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, through 1953* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb,* volume 2*, Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb,* volume 3*, Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Paul Rubenson, *Rethinking the American Antinuclear Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Angela Sante, "Ronald Reagan, the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign and the Nuclear Scare of the 1980s," *International History Review* (2017), 39 no. 3, 496-520.

strategy with the Soviets."[328] Historian Paul Rubinson notes that activists fought against the use of nuclear weapons since their inception and that the movement "expressed the demand of citizens to have a say in the foreign policy waged in their name as well as the public's opposition to nuclear war as an instrument of foreign policy."[329] Antinuclear weapons activists can, therefore, take credit for "enabling treaties" that prevented the use of nuclear weapons.[330] They also can take credit, in part, for making "the use of nuclear weapons in war" unthinkable, ensuring that there has not been a repeat of the likes of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.[331] Given the grassroots activism of Sisters Platte and Gilbert on behalf of the International Committee Against Nuclear Weapons' recent Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and its implementation in January 2021, and the awarding of the Nobel Peace Award for ICAN's work, it is not an overstatement to argue that activists have driven policy.[332] How nuclear-capable nations respond to this treaty will determine, in the long run, how successful the antinuclear weapons movement has been.[333]

Peaceful Pathways: Marywood, War, and Nuclear Weapons

Today, the Dominican Sisters at Marywood strongly advocate against all wars and oppose the possession and use of nuclear weapons, outpacing the Vatican's slowly evolving policies on

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[328] Sante, 497.
[329] Rubinson, x.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Ibid. See also the work of victims of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who have added to this movement: "Hiroshima 75th Anniversary: Preserving Survivor's Message of Peace," *The New York Times,* August 8, 2020; "Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Women Survivors of the Atomic Bomb," *BBC,* August 2, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-53476318.
[332] ICAN is a coalition of around one hundred non-governmental organizations, and "has been the driving force in prevailing upon the world's nations to pledge to cooperate with all relevant stakeholders in efforts to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons," "The Nobel Peace Prize for 2017," The Nobel Prize, October 6, 2017, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2017/press-release/; "ICAN Receives 2017 Nobel Peace Prize," ICAN, undated, https://www.icanw.org/nobel_prize; "ICAN Wins Nobel Peace Prize," Arms Control Association, November, 2017, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2017-11/news/ican-wins-nobel-peace-prize.
[333] Awarding ICAN with the Nobel Prize, the Norwegian Nobel Committee stated that it "is aware that an international legal prohibition will not in itself eliminate a single weapon, and that so far neither states that already have nuclear weapons nor their closest allies support the nuclear weapon ban treaty. The Committee wishes to emphasize that the next steps towards attaining a world free of nuclear weapons must involve the nuclear-armed states. "The Nobel Peace Prize for 2017," The Nobel Prize, October 6, 2017, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2017/press-release/.

Just War theology and nuclear deterrence.[334] Most recently, the Dominican Sisters at Marywood condemned the United States government for its decade's involvement in wars in the Middle East, writing, "While these wars have not advanced a lasting peace, they have destroyed millions of lives, decimated societies, and created a refugee crisis of unimaginable proportions. The consequences of warfare are wide-ranging and disproportionately suffered by those who bear no responsibility for the violence." They urge the federal government to "find peaceful pathways to resolving conflicts" rather than engaging in a never-ending cycle of military intervention and retaliation.[335]

Initially, however, not all Marywood Sisters shared Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson's provocative style of protest when the Sisters began their antinuclear weapons ministry in the early 1980s. Some Sisters did not agree that acts of civil disobedience, which could land a Sister in prison, were in line with the Gospels. As some members of the congregation continued to engage in acts of civil disobedience and were arrested beginning in the mid-to-late 1970s, the congregation's leaders and members became concerned about possible legal and financial repercussions that the entire community might face. They, therefore, developed a congregational policy to protect the activists and the congregation, a policy which went into effect in 1986. It reads, in part, that "A member can never be missioned to break the law. The members are not acting as agents of the congregation, thus the congregation does not bear any financial burden due to their action."[336] This policy not only protects the congregation, but it also "recognizes that the individual Sister's conscience is her highest moral guide, transcending even the requirements of

[334] "Corporate Stance: Nuclear Disarmament," Dominican Sisters, Grand Rapids, Michigan, November 15, 2007, https://www.grdominicans.org/corporate-stance-nuclear-disarmament/.
[335] "Dominican Sisters Oppose the Escalation of War Involving Iraq, Iran, and the United States, January 6, 2020, https://www.grdominicans.org/dominican-sisters-oppose-escalation-of-wars-involving-iraq-iran-and-united-states/.
[336] Navarre, 248.

Religious Life."[337] In essence, the 1986 statement cleared the way for members, with their fellow Sisters' support, to continue committing acts of civil resistance and disobedience without endangering the congregation.[338]

The congregation in 2007, established firm declarations for the removal and abolition of nuclear weapons.[339] Marywood's policy statement on nuclear weapons, influenced in large part by Gilbert, Platte, and Hudson's activism, reads,

> We believe that humanity has been living in the shadow of nuclear weapons for too long. Earth has been desecrated by the testing of nuclear arms. Nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction continue to pose a threat to all creation. Our country cannot rightly seek to halt the spread of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, while maintaining our own stockpile of weapons and developing new armament capabilities. We stand with scientists and military leaders who believe that eliminating nuclear weapons will make our world for all forms of life. The first step is to develop a detailed plan to lock down, reduce and eliminate nuclear and all weapons of mass destruction.[340]

The congregation sought to eliminate nuclear weapons, and other weapons of mass destruction, in more practical ways, as well, by "refraining from investing in businesses which: manufacture nuclear weapons, are among the top 25 weapons contractors, own nuclear power facilities, develop or produce biological or chemical weapons."[341] Marywood's policy on investing in corporations reflects the Global Sullivan Principles, for which many religious orders adopted. The Sullivan Principles, established in 1977 by the American minister, Leon Sullivan, "to apply economic pressure on South Africa to revise, and eventually abandon, its system of apartheid, was

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[337] Ibid.
[338] While the congregation has this policy in place, it remains committed to the anti-nuclear weapons and anti-war work of Sisters who commit acts of civil resistance. To support the ongoing anti-nuclear weapons and war work, Marywood Sisters often attend anti-nuclear weapons and war rallies, peace conferences, and other events but do not commit acts of civil resistance.
[339] Navarre, 288.
[340] "Corporate Stance," Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood, November 15, 2007, https://www.grdominicans.org/corporate-stance-nuclear-disarmament/.
[341] Navarre, 288.

extended in 1999 to pressure global corporations "to support economic, social and political justice."[342]

The anti-war declarations of the Sisters had their roots in the postwar period. Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters trace their evolution in opposing war and nuclear weapons to the theological developments in the 1940s and 1950s, the Second Vatican Council, and subsequent encyclicals from the Vatican, all of which contributed to growing social justice consciences among Marywood Sisters.[343] New theological developments in the years between World War II and the Second Vatican Council had already prepared many Catholics to consider addressing the world's social problems, including the proliferation and potential use of nuclear weapons. While the majority of Catholics agreed with the Church's Just War doctrine at the close of World War II, new theologies engaging in discussions about the new nuclear age were emerging.

The most influential theologian in these debates was the American Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, who, during the first two decades after World War II, sought to "reconcile the Catholic Faith with the realities of life in the nuclear age."[344] One of the "most widely read Catholic authors of the twentieth century," Merton developed an extensive writing correspondence with Pope John XXIII. This correspondence may have "been a factor in the pope's decision to write," the 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth),* which addressed the deep divisions and dangers caused by the Cold War.[345] Merton rejected the Church's long-held Just War theory and, instead,

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[342] "Global Sullivan Principles," University of Minnesota Human Rights Library, http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/links/sullivanprinciples.html; John L. Allen, "Vatican to Craft Catholic 'Sullivan Principles,'" *National Catholic Reporter*, March 1, 2011, https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-craft-catholic-sullivan-principles.

[343] Navarre, 8, 240.

[344] Marian Mollin, *Radical Pacifism in Modern America: Egalitarianism and Protest,* Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania Press, 33-34.

[345] Jim Forest, "Pope John XXIII, Thomas Merton and the Second Vatican Council's Message of Peace," Lecture to Dutch Catholic Military Chaplains, April 25, 2013, Zin Conference, Vught, The Netherlands, https://www.cacatholic.org/article/pacem-terris-peace-earth.

insisted that total destruction brought about by nuclear weapons "were anathema to the coming of the Kingdom of God."[346]

Since the fourth and fifth centuries, the Catholic Church has relied on the Just War theory for its teaching on war. Although initially rooted in Augustine's view of justice and war, "We do not seek peace in order to be at war, but we go to war that we may have peace," it is Thomas Aquinas's interpretation in the thirteenth century, in *Summa Theologica*, and then expanded by later scholars, which eventually became the Just War theory relied upon by the Catholic Church. Just War theory provides six criteria that must be satisfied before a country could engage in military action: just cause (self-defense, protecting the innocent, etc.), proportionate cause (going to war must outweigh the death and destruction caused by war), right intention (in line with the ethic of Christian love), right authority (war can only be authorized by a legitimate government), reasonable chance of success and last resort (all peaceful alternatives must first be exhausted). Merton, however, argued that the survival of humanity would need to rely on a new theology: a theology of peace and nonviolence and pointed to Mohandas Gandhi's non-violence as a tool to engage in important issues of the day.[347]

In the opening years of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII's 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris,* (*On Establishing Universal Peace In Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty*), warned against the possibility of another world war.[348] Written as the Cold War was prompting nuclear-capable countries to increase their stockpiles of nuclear weapons, and only six months

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[346] Ibid.

[347] See James Turner Johnson, "Aquinas and Luther on War and Peace: Sovereign Authority and the Use of Armed Force," *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol. 31 no. 1, (Spring, 2001), 6. The most important writers to expand and universalize just war theory are: Francisco de Vitoria, Francisco Suarez, Hugo Grotius, Samuel Pufendorf, Christian Wolf and Emmerich de Vattel; http://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/a-brief-introduction-to-the-just-war-tradition-jus-ad-bellum/. The majority of Plowshares activists are Catholic but the organization is not exclusionary and its membership is diverse with some Protestants, Jews, and some Buddhists..

[348] Second Vatican Council, *Pacem in Terris,* April 11, 1963. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.

after the Cuban Missile Crisis nearly engulfed the world in a nuclear war, John XXIII urged nations to look for ways to eventually ban nuclear weapons. Thomas Merton stated that, "the calamity of a world war, with the economic and social ruin and the moral excesses and dissolution that accompany it, must not on any account be permitted to engulf the human race for a third time."[349] Although the Church slowly inched towards promoting the complete abolition of nuclear weapons, (it took the Church another fifty years to condemn the possession of nuclear weapons outright), it continued to accept a qualified form of deterrence as the safest means of preventing a nuclear war until disarmament or abolition occurred, noting that "the monstrous power of modern weapons does indeed act as a deterrent."[350]

The reliance of the Second Vatican Council and the Catholic Church on the theory of Just War, however, led radical Catholic pacifists, such as Sisters Plate, Gilbert, Hudson, and other Plowshares activists, to regard the Church's stand on Just War as "unfaithfulness to the Gospel." They saw "an intrinsic connection between nonviolence, the passion of Jesus, and the Church's ministry of word and sacrament."[351] Although anti-nuclear weapons protests by pro-peace Catholics and other activists were intended to criticize the federal government's nuclear policy, Plowshare's activists also used their actions to challenge religious leaders who continued to embrace Just War theory and deterrence, arguing Church leaders exhibited "complacency on issues of militarism and war."[352]

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[349]Ibid.

[350] In 2017 Pope Francis, broke with the Church's longstanding embrace of deterrence and condemned the possession of nuclear weapons as immoral. "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants in the International Symposium 'Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament," November 10, 2017. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/november/documents/papa-francesco_20171110_convegno-disarmointegrale.html. Ibid.

[351] Sharia Moody, "The Church at the End of the World," *Yale Daily News,* November 25, 2020. http.//features.yaledailynews.com/blog/2020/11/25/the-church-at-the-end-of-the-world/.

[352] Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

Conservative critics of Catholic pacifism, by contrast, argued that war, while undesirable, is necessary to protect Christians being persecuted for their faith and against possible terrorist attacks. Pacifist detractors solidified this position after the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. Despite this criticism, the Catholic Church's thinking on Just War theology and deterrence did evolve, moving the Church closer, ever so slowly, to the stand of radical antinuclear weapons pacifists, such as the Plowshares activists.

During John-Paul II's long pontificate (1978-2005), coinciding with the massive nuclear military buildup of the Reagan years, the Catholic Church maintained its support for deterrence, but its policy "inched toward abolition, and continued to do so under John Paul's successor, Benedict XVI."[353] In Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 message on World Day of Peace, he encouraged the international community to "insure progressive disarmament and a world free of nuclear weapons, whose presence alone threatens the life of the planet."[354] According to scholars who study the Vatican's rhetoric regarding peace and war, the statement, in the parlance of the Vatican, by using the phrase, "presence alone," reflected the slow movement towards abolition.[355]

At the Vatican's international conference on disarmament in 2017, Pope Francis went further yet, rejecting the Church's long-standing tolerance of nuclear deterrence. He condemned their possession outright for the first time. Stating that, "If we also take into account the risk of an accidental detonation [of nuclear weapons] . . . the threat of their use as well as their very possession is to be firmly condemned," Pope Francis moved the Church towards a "mandatory ethic of progressive disarmament."[356] On the seventy-fifth anniversary of the nuclear attacks on

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[353] Ibid.
[354]"Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI For the Celebration For the World Day of Peace: If You Want to Cultivate Peace Protect Creation," January 1, 2010. https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html.
[355] Elie, "The Pope and Catholic Radicals."
[356] "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants in the International Symposium 'Prospects for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and for Integral Disarmament," November 10, 2017.

Japan, he visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki and once again reiterated his call for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Remarking that "Peace and international stability are incompatible with attempts to build upon the fear of mutual destruction or the threat of total annihilation," Pope Francis encouraged the world to "ponder the catastrophic impact of their deployment, especially from a humanitarian and environmental standpoint." He also made clear that the "arms race wastes precious resources that could be better used to benefit the integral development of peoples and to protect the natural environment."[357] Dominican Sisters at Marywood, echoing their early opposition to nuclear armament, fully embrace the Vatican's new stance against nuclear weapons.

The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters: Moving Towards Radical Antinuclear Weapons Activism

Sisters Gilbert, Hudson, and Platte's initial social justice activism did not begin in the antinuclear weapons movement, but within the confines of the Marywood convent. On the heels of the Second Vatican Council, the Dominican Sisters at Marywood experienced a wave of changes that led many Sisters to think about ministry beyond classrooms and hospitals to focus on the needs of the most vulnerable members of their communities, especially to those in the inner cities.[358] Sisters Gilbert, Platte, and Hudson entered the Dominican order immediately after they each completed high school, or shortly thereafter. They were among the members of the

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/november/documents/papa-francesco_20171110_convegno-disarmointegrale.html.

[357] "Pope Francis Calls For a World Free of Nuclear Weapons," *Vatican News,* November 19, 2019; Laurel Wamsley, "Pope Francis, In Visit to Hiroshima, Says Possession of Nuclear Weapons is 'Immoral,'" NPR, November 24, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/11/24/782450610/pope-francis-in-visit-to-hiroshima-says-possession-of-nuclear-weapons-is-immoral; Gerard O'Connell, "Pope Francis at Nagasaki and Hiroshima Makes Impassioned Plea for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament," *America; The Jesuit Review,* November 24, 2019, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/11/24/pope-francis-nagasaki-and-hiroshima-makes-impassioned-plea-peace-and-nuclear.

[358] Many Nuns and Sisters continued to serve in classrooms and hospitals after the Second Vatican Council and still considered ministries in these areas as their main focus, but women religious began to add other ministries outside of these areas. The Council's encyclical, *Gaudium et Spes*, which emphasized the need of the Church (as in the body of believers) to address social justice issues was the main impetus during the immediate post conciliar years.

congregation that experienced the most radical changes to religious life that the Second Vatican Council generated and eventually devoted their lives to tackling social justice issues.

For most Marywood Sisters, including Gilbert, Platte, and Hudson, their first forays into social justice activism began in the early 1960s with engagements in civil rights marches and protests against the Vietnam War. Some of the first actions Marywood Sisters partook in were civil rights marches held in Grand Rapids, such as a demonstration against the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing which resulted in the deaths of four young girls, in the fall of 1963. Responding to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and their growing social consciences, the entire congregation "engaged in prayer, study, and public action on behalf of Justice."[359] Additional decrees from the Vatican and the International Synod of Bishops, an advisory body to the Pope, to "create a more just world," encouraged the Sisters and to act on behalf of justice.[360] In these early years of social justice activism, the majority of Marywood Sisters, while still focusing on their teaching and nursing ministry, experimented with participating in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements, but only rarely strayed into acts of civil disobedience. Some Sisters, however, found that these two causes demanded more than rallies and marches and embarked on radical social justice actions.

On February 6, 1970, thirty-two-year-old Sister Susan Cordes of Marywood, and ten members of an anti-war group, the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives, broke into a draft board office in Philadelphia and destroyed draft files, "as an act of resistance to the War in Vietnam."[361]

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[359] Navarre, 240.

[360] *Octogesima Adveniens: Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI, On the Occasion of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Encyclical Rerum Novarum,* May 14, 1971, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html; 1971 World Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World, #6,* https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf.

[361] "East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives" flyer highlighting the group's mission statement, accomplishments, and short biographies of members. Sister Cordes stands in the second row, fourth from the left. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives: Collection on Peace Activism, Series 002: East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives, Box 002,

The group, which included four Catholic priests, another Woman Religious, and teachers and students, sought to "confront by our actions those institutions with which we are affiliated—church and education," to force church and education leaders to "serve the needs of man," rather than serving "American power." The next day, the group "liberated and destroyed" files at a General Electric office in Washington, D.C., "because G.E. is the second-largest war contractor in the United States . . . and we wish to point out the collusion between the military system, giant corporations and government." A flyer, typed up the day of the G.E. action, stated that they were "committed to a non-violent revolution against injustice."[362] Comparing the G.E. and draft board files to "Hitler's gas ovens" and "Stalin's concentration camps," they argued that "files of conscription and slum properties have no right to exist."[363] The East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives was among a small number of Catholic Left and New Left groups, usually located on the East Coast, who were protesting the draft in the early years of the Vietnam War. Raiding draft board offices, and burning or destroying draft cards by other means, was a common tactic among antiwar activists meant to draw attention, especially of the press, to their opposition to the draft and the War in Vietnam.[364]

Sister Cordes entered Marywood in the late 1950s. After graduating from Aquinas College in 1961, she worked with the college's federally funded Upward Bound program, which was designed to help high school students from low-income families prepare for college. In the mid-

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[363] "East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives" flyer highlighting the group's mission statement, accomplishments, and short biographies of members. Sister Cordes stands in the second row, fourth from the left. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives: Collection on Peace Activism, Series 002: East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives, Box 002, Folder 001.

[364] For draft board raids, see: Shawn Francis Peters, *The Catonsville Nine: A Story of Faith and Resistance in the Vietnam Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Fig. 3.2. Members of the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives. Sister Cordes: fourth from left, second row.[365]

1960s, she was assigned a teaching job in the inner city of Saginaw and then became the director of the St. Joseph Adult Education Program in that city. In 1970, however, it appears that she moved to Washington, D.C., because she wanted "to work with people involved with the resistance to the draft." Reflecting on the more tempered anti-Vietnam War activism in her home state, and perhaps in her religious community, Cordes noted that "there aren't any people in Michigan involved the way I want to be." Sister Ann Keating of Marywood, Academic Dean of Aquinas College, noted

[365] "East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives" picture of members. Sister Cordes stands fourth from the left, second row. DePaul University Special Collections and Archives: Collection on Peace Activism, Series 002: East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives, Box 002, Folder 001.

that Cordes, was "following her conscience," and that she was "working from the constructive aspect, not the destructive side. She's not radical; she's definitely nonviolent."[366]

It is unclear if Sister Cordes and her fellow anti-Vietnam War resisters faced any legal consequences for their actions in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. In 1970, director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, however, accused other members of the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives in 1970 of allegedly instigating a plot to blow up underground utility lines in Washington, D.C. The alleged plot also included a plan to kidnap National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger and hold him hostage until the United States ended the bombing of Southeast Asia and released "all political prisoners," in the United States.[367] Sister Cordes garnered national attention when she spoke on behalf of those implicated in the plot, which included the famed radical Catholic priests Philip and Daniel Berrigan, and nine others. She "den[ied] accusations by Hoover that the group was planning to blow up utilities and kidnap Kissinger." Cordes claimed that the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives was a "militant group but a militant group respecting human life, taking every precaution known and that the group didn't bomb buildings. Rather, she asserted, "the Selective Service does this."[368] When asked why one of the Berrigan brothers was seen in the seen in the underground tunnels, she replied that she had no idea.[369] While Cordes's acts of civil disobedience were radical for the majority of the Dominican Sisters at this juncture, her actions foreshadowed future acts of protest, some radical in nature in which some members of Marywood engaged, that began in the

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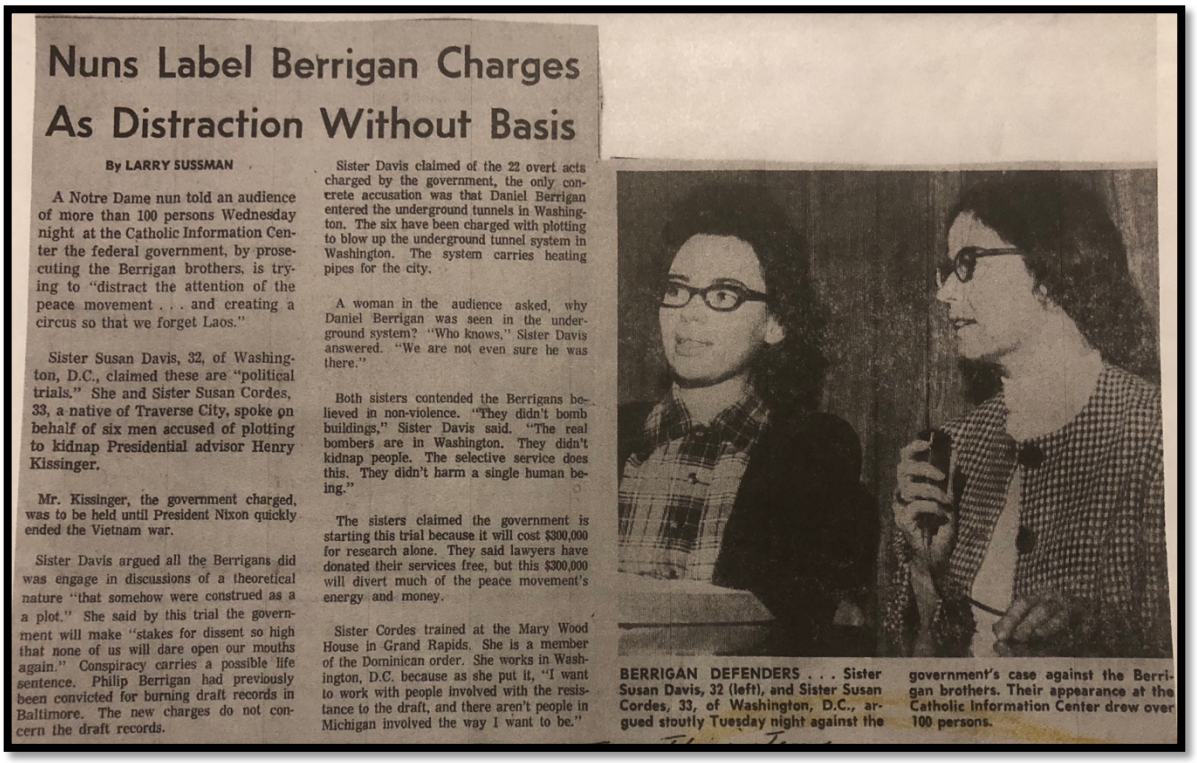
[366] "Local Nun Joins Row with FBI," *The Grand Rapids Press,* December 1, 1970; Larry Sussman, "Nuns Label Berrigan Charges As Distraction Without Basis," *The Muskegon Chronicle,* undated. Article provide by Sister Michael Ellen Carling, O.P. Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.

[367]Because the files of individual Marywood Sisters remain confidential, and I was unable to locate any information about Sister Cordes online, I was unable to glean much more information about her life apart from a few local newspaper articles, and the East Coast Conspiracy to Save Lives photo and flyer located in the DePaul University special archives. Sisters I interviewed for this project have few memories of her of which to report. "Local Nun Joins Row With FBI," *The Grand Rapids Press,* December 1, 1970.

[368] Ibid; Susman, *The Grand Rapids Press,* undated, courtesy of Sister Michael Ellen Carling, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood. The charges against the Berrigan brothers and the other activists were eventually dropped.

[369] Ibid.



Nuns Label Berrigan Charges As Distraction Without Basis

By LARRY SUSSMAN

A Notre Dame nun told an audience of more than 100 persons Wednesday night at the Catholic Information Center the federal government, by prosecuting the Berrigan brothers, is trying to "distract the attention of the peace movement . . . and creating a circus so that we forget Laos."

Sister Susan Davis, 32, of Washington, D.C., claimed these are "political trials." She and Sister Susan Cordes, 33, a native of Traverse City, spoke on behalf of six men accused of plotting to kidnap Presidential advisor Henry Kissinger.

Mr. Kissinger, the government charged, was to be held until President Nixon quickly ended the Vietnam war.

Sister Davis argued all the Berrigans did was engage in discussions of a theoretical nature "that somehow were construed as a a plot." She said by this trial the government will make "stakes for dissent so high that none of us will dare open our mouths again." Conspiracy carries a possible life sentence. Philip Berrigan had previously been convicted for burning draft records in Baltimore. The new charges do not concern the draft records.

Sister Davis claimed of the 22 overt acts charged by the government, the only concrete accusation was that Daniel Berrigan entered the underground tunnels in Washington. The six have been charged with plotting to blow up the underground tunnel system in Washington. The system carries heating pipes for the city.

A woman in the audience asked, why Daniel Berrigan was seen in the underground system? "Who knows," Sister Davis answered. "We are not even sure he was there."

Both sisters contended the Berrigans believed in non-violence. "They didn't bomb buildings," Sister Davis said. "The real bombers are in Washington. They didn't kidnap people. The selective service does this. They didn't harm a single human being."

The sisters claimed the government is starting this trial because it will cost $300,000 for research alone. They said lawyers have donated their services free, but this $300,000 will divert much of the peace movement's energy and money.

Sister Cordes trained at the Mary Wood House in Grand Rapids. She is a member of the Dominican order. She works in Washington, D.C. because as she put it, "I want to work with people involved with the resistance to the draft, and there aren't people in Michigan involved the way I want to be."

BERRIGAN DEFENDERS . . . Sister Susan Davis, 32 (left), and Sister Susan Cordes, 33, of Washington, D.C., argued stoutly Tuesday night against the government's case against the Berrigan brothers. Their appearance at the Catholic Information Center drew over 100 persons.

Fig. 3.3. Newspaper article covering the prosecution of the Berigan brothers. Sister Susan Cordes, right.[370]

late 1970s and early1980s.

Although becoming internationally-know antinuclear war resisters in the latter half of the twentieth century, Sisters Hudson, Gilbert, and Platte began their radical activism in the anti-war or anti-nuclear weapons movements rather circuitously through other social justice ministries. Interactions with poor black children in inner cities, migrant farmers who battled big agriculture and poisonous chemicals, and battered women in need of safe shelter led the Sisters to see how unequal power structures in American society led directly to many injustices in the United States.[371] They also began to recognize how the local, state, and the federal governments, in conjunction with the country's giant corporations, sustained those power structures, embedding

[370] Larry Sussman, "Nuns Label Berrigan Charges as Distraction Without Basis, *Muskegon Chronicle,* undated. Newspaper clipping courtesy of Sr. Michael Ellen Carling, O.P. Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[371] Interview with author, May 2019.

injustices further in American society.[372] Each Sister's trajectory towards radical antinuclear weapons activism was unique; but for each woman, their faith and the deep-seated desire for social justice intersected and galvanized them to move beyond the confines of the convent and help the dispossessed.

Sister Jackie Hudson, the eldest of the three Sister-activists, was born in 1934 in Saginaw, Michigan, to a Catholic family. The youngest of two children, Hudson joined the Dominican order immediately after graduating high school in 1958. Earning a Bachelor's degree from Aquinas College, and then a Master's degree at Vander Cook College of Music in Chicago, she spent nearly three decades teaching band, orchestra, and choral music to junior and high school students and even sang with the Marywood vocal ensemble, the Mellow D's, using song to minister to others.[373] She was one of the first Marywood Sisters to experiment with "revolutionary" non-convent living arrangements, when in 1969, she moved out of the Marywood Motherhouse and rented a house in Grand Rapids with four other Sisters.[374] This living arrangement "would be marked by the innovative concept of complete collegiality in governance," meaning that there would be no central governing body within the household.[375] Rather, the Sisters wanted to "try collegiality on the basis of equal status."[376] Their housing experiment lasted for fourteen years. The congregation considered it a success.

Hudson's transformation from a music teacher to a radical peace activist began in 1982, when she heard renowned antinuclear campaigner and author, Dr. Helen Caldicott, speak on the

[372] Ibid.
[373] Navarre, 178.
[374] Navarre, 142.
[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.

dangers of nuclear weapons.[377] In time, she followed her fellow Dominican Sisters, Platte and Gilbert in protests and actions against American-led wars and nuclear weapons. During the mid-1990s, she was arrested for protesting the United States war in Iraq. She had traveled to the war-torn country after the United States established sanctions to, "see first-hand the effects of the sanctions and daily bombings [had] on the ordinary people of that country, and to bring that message of civilian death and devastation home to the American people."[378]

Sister Hudson also engaged in many other social justice ministries besides antiwar and antinuclear weapons protests. After retiring from teaching in the late 1980s, she moved to the state of Washington for the "Ground Zero for Non-Violent Action" organization. Created in 1977 to protest the nuclear Trident submarines at the Bangor Naval Submarine Base in Kitsap County, Washington, Ground Zero members engaged in "multiple forms of nonviolent action and civil disobedience" against the submarines.[379] While in Washington, Sister Hudson worked Sister Hudson worked for prison reform and rallied for the "Hand's Off Campaign Washington" to protect the LGBTQ community from discrimination.[380]

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[377] Dan Drollette, "A Conversation with Helen Caldicott," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* Vol. 74, No. 3 (May 2018); Helen Caldicott, *Sleepwalking to Armageddon: The Threat of Nuclear Annihilation* (New York: The New Press, 2017).

[378] Information on Sister Hudson's trip to Iraq is sparse, but she may have travelled to the country with a group of American Dominicans in one of the many "Voices for Veritas" trips to Iraq. These trips were considered acts of civil disobedience as the United States government had placed sanctions on Americans traveling there. American sanctions on Iraq lasted from August 1990 to May 2003. https://disarmnowplowshares.wordpress.com/2011/08/03/sister-jackie-hudson-passed-away-this-morning/.

[379] "Ground Zero for Non-Violence Action Records, 1956-2013," Orbis Cascade Alliance, http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/8044/xv83804.

[380] "Her Story: Sister Inspiration: Jackie Hudson, O.P." http://grdominicans.org/sister-inspiration-jackie-hudson; "Elegy for a peacemaker: Sister Jacqueline Hudson," Dominican Life/USA. http://www.domlife.org/2011Stories/memoriam_jackie-hudson.html; Justin Engel, "Saginaw native, activist nun's funeral today," *The Saginaw News,* August 8, 2011; Sue Ablao, DisarmNowPlowshares.org; Charles Honey, "Grand Rapids nun known for going to jail for protesting nuclear weapons dies at age 76," *The Grand Rapids Press,* April 3, 2011; Amy Phan, "Jackie Hudson, nun who believed in nuclear disarmament, dies at 76," *The Kitsap Sun*, August 5, 2011; "Hands Off Washington (Organization) Whatcom County Coalition. https://snaccooperative.org/ark:/99166/w6xq32xh.

Fig. 3.4. Sister Jackie Hudson lecturing at a peace conference, November 22, 2009.[381]

Living on the West Coast she participated in, and was arrested for, dozens of antinuclear weapons actions throughout the country. Before her death in 2011, she lectured tirelessly about the inherent dangers of nuclear weapons and encouraged others to be proactive in their opposition to America's nuclear infrastructure.

Sister Carol Gilbert, the youngest of the three, was born in 1947 in Traverse City, Michigan. Educated in Catholic Schools, Sister Platte, who later became Sister Gilbert's life-long partner in activism, was Gilbert's homeroom teacher in her senior year of high school. Sister Gilbert entered Marywood immediately after graduating high school in 1965 and then graduated in 1969 with a Bachelor's degree from Aquinas College. Sister Gilbert's path to radical social activism also began gradually, but several events marked her growing awareness of social injustices. As a sophomore in college, she attended a lecture by a woman whose grandfather was

[381] "Jackie at the First Festival of Hope," November 22, 2009, photo courtesy of Disarm Now Plowshares, https://disarmnowplowshares.wordpress.com/.

imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp during World War Two. She was struck by her lack of knowledge about the internment camps, stating that, "I was a sociology major, and I thought to myself, how many other stories don't I know?" This gave her "permission to begin to question authority [and] that was a real turning point."[382] Sister James Rau, an early civil rights activist at Marywood and Aquinas College, was instrumental in influencing Gilbert, encouraging her to participate in civil rights marches in various cities throughout Michigan.[383]

Sister Gilbert spent her first years after graduating from college teaching in the inner-city Saginaw, where she and two other Sisters began an after-school study program for low-income children in the Saginaw Diocese. The program, Community Learning Center, ministered to over four-hundred children, ages 5-16, a day, four days a week. Besides providing instruction for the children, the Center provided parents with assistance to help guide their children's education.[384] She helped found the "Home for Peace and Justice" in Saginaw to "unite people of all faiths and to focus on particular issues." Here, the Sisters provided "resources and educational workshops and facilitators for direct legal and political action," focusing on issues such as the "draft, disarmament, criminal justice, poverty, and women's issues."[385] She and Sister Ardeth also worked to prevent a Junior ROTC program from being established in the Saginaw School District.[386]

When, in the late 1970s, Sister Carol traveled to Melvindale, a town near Detroit, she was introduced to the Farmworkers Movement and Caesar Chavez by Marywood Sister Ann Porter, who was involved in the movement.[387] It was in the Farmworkers movement that Sister Gilbert

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[382] Interview with author, May 10, 2019.
[383] Ibid.
[384] Mary Lawrence Foreman, "After-school study becomes popular," *The Saginaw News,* May 27, 1978.
[385] Ardeth Platte, "Public Office: An Option for One, a Mandate for Another," in *Between God and Caesar: Priests, Sisters and Political Office in the United States,* Madonna Kolbenshlag, ed. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
[386] Author interview with Carol Gilbert, May 10, 2019; "Sister Carol Gilbert," Grand Rapids Dominicans, https://www.grdominicans.org/sisters/sister-carol-gilbert/.
[387] For Catholics in the Farmworkers Movement, see: Marco J. Prouty, *César Chávez, the Catholic Bishops, and the Farmworkers Struggle for Social Justice* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2006);

experienced her first arrest for civil disobedience.[388] She later traveled to Nicaragua in the mid-1980s with the Global Awareness through Experience program, which sought to create awareness of other cultures. Gilbert travelled to Nicaragua with a group of fellow Religious, including Henri Nouwen, the noted Dutch Catholic priest and theologian.[389]

Her excursion to Central America was not meant as a pleasure trip, however, as she and the other travelers went directly into war zones to meet with residents in battered villages and towns.[390] Gilbert barely made the flight to Nicaragua, however, as she was in a Bay City court the day before her scheduled departure, for a civil disobedience action she committed at the Airforce base there. The judge, having confiscated Gilbert's passport, only returned it to her after she produced a letter from Senator Carl Levin, who had asked her to investigate a case of a murdered man in Nicaragua.[391]

In the late 1980s, Sister Gilbert and Sister Platte moved to upper Michigan, and then to Michigan's upper peninsula, to protest nuclear weapons located on Michigan's two strategic air command bases, Wurtsmith Air Force Base near Oscoda, and KI Sawyer Air Force Base in Marquette.[392] Until the bases were closed in the mid-1990s, the Sisters were arrested multiple times

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[388] Author interview with Carol Gilbert, May 10, 2019.

[389] The Global Awareness through Experience program was established, "In response to the call of Pope John XXIII to religious congregations in the United States to send 10% of their members to Latin America, many congregations of Sisters established a missionary presence there, from Mexico to Chile." GATE, http://www.gate-travel.org/content/about-us; Dierdre La Noue, *The Spiritual Legacy of Henri Nouwen,* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2000); Michael O'Laughlin, *God's Beloved: A Spiritual Biography of Henri Nouwen,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004); Michael Fore, *Wounded Prophet; A Portrait of Henri J.M. Nouwen,* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

[390] Ibid. Navarre, 166.

[391] Interview with author, May 10, 2019.

[392] Wurtsmith Air Force Base, in Oscoda, Michigan, was established in 1923. It "served primarily as a combat crew and bomber training base throughout its 70-year history." The base played "an important role in World War II, Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War, housing the 134th Army Air Force Base Fighter Unit and 379th Bombardment Wing." It closed in 1993. "Former Wurtsmith Air Force Base, Iosco County," https://www.michigan.gov/pfasresponse/0,9038,7-365-86511_82704_83952---,00.html.

for entering the bases illegally, putting up peace posters, and praying.[393] Their activism, and that of other activists, pressured the state to remove nuclear weapons from the base.[394] While living near the Air Force bases in upper Michigan, she and Sister Platte had been accused of being anti-military.[395] Recognizing that many servicemen enlisted because they had little prospects of finding good-paying jobs outside of the military, the Sisters "grew to know many of the service members," often inviting them to their home to share meals. On occasion, they even received phone calls from pilots stationed in Upper Michigan who were on tour in Iraq.[396]

Sister Platte, arguably the more loquacious and well-known of the three Sisters, was born on Good Friday, 1936, in Lansing to Herman and Helen Platte. Before she was two years old, her parents divorced. Her father raised her and older brother, Richard, after moving to a town in the Upper Peninsula near Copper Harbor. When Ardeth was eight years old, her father moved the family back to the Lower Peninsula to the small rural town of Westphalia, so that her paternal grandparents could help raise the children.[397] When she was twelve, Ardeth nearly died due to a serious infection. She dedicated her life to God after she recovered. Her father, valuing a college education because he was unable to attend himself, refused to let Ardeth enter a religious order until she attended at least one year of college.[398] She wrote with fondness that her father helped her understand the connection between the Gospels and the need to address injustices in the world. She noted that "it was no real surprise in the early 1960s when Dad traveled to live and work in Mexico and Guatemala among the Indian people" and shared "stories about the people. His letters

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[393] Nuclear weapons were brought Wurtsmith Air Force Base in 1983 and to KI Sawyer in 1985. "Former Wurtsmith Air Force Base, Iosco County," https://www.michigan.gov/pfasresponse/0,9038,7-365-86511_82704_83952---,00.html.
[394] "Ardeth Platte," Michigan Women Forward, https://miwf.org/timeline/ardeth-platte/.
[395] Interview with author, May 10, 2019.
[396] Ibid.
[397] "Sister Ardeth Platte, O.P.: Life Story and Obituary," *Grand Rapids Dominicans,* https://www.grdominicans.org/sisters/sister-ardeth-platte/.
[398] Interview with author, May 10, 2019.

home were like the epistles of the early Church in which the Gospel message and the essence of religious living were linked."[399]

After spending one year at Aquinas College, Platte entered the Dominican order in 1954, later graduating with a Bachelor's degree. After assisting Marywood Sisters and Aquinas College with their Upward Bound program, and teaching in various locations in Michigan, she was assigned a teaching position at St. Joseph's High School in the inner city of Saginaw in 1966.[400] She became the principal of that school shortly thereafter while she was still in her twenties. Saginaw, a Midwest industrial city, "comprised predominately of white, black, and Spanish-speaking people," was vastly different from her rural hometown of Westphalia. While in Saginaw, Platte experienced the height of the civil rights movement and the riots of 1967 and 1968 first-hand, and "tried to associate closely with the people and learn from them their needs and hopes."[401]

It wasn't until 1973, however, when she ran for public office for the first time, that she finally began to understand how a "government's power structure" enforced poverty, rather than relieving it, leading to systemic inequality and injustices.[402] Her election to a Council seat in Saginaw was not only remarkable for electing the Council's first woman to the board, but for electing its first nun.[403] While the former mayor of Saginaw did not believe that Sister Platte's

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[399] Platte, "Public Office," 273.

[400] The Upward Bound Program, a federal program, was established in 1965. It "provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their precollege performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits . . . it serves high school students from low-income families, and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree." The program's goal "is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education." "Upward Bound Program," United States Department of Education, https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html.

[401] Ibid; Interview with author, May 10, 2010. Andrew Salas, "Riots in the City," *Mid-Michigan Remembers Stories About Us: A Project of Delta College Students and Staff,* undated, https://websites.delta.edu/michiganremembers/stories/Riots%20in%20the%20City-Salas.htm; Isis Simpson-Mersh, "50 Years After Saginaw Riots, Activists Say Struggle Still Continues," July 25, 2017, MLIVE, https://www.mlive.com/news/saginaw/2017/07/50_years_after_saginaw_police.html.

[402] Interview with author, May 10, 2010.

[403] "Two Women Win Council Seats in Close Election," *The Saginaw News,* November 7, 1973.

election“ change things very much," and that the "city's current course (would) be followed," Platte had different plans. In her twelve years as a Saginaw Councilwoman, and during her stint as mayor pro temp, she made sure that "persons who had been excluded from influence and control over matters that affect(ed) their lives," were given a voice in the governance of their community.[404] Platte also made sure her colleagues knew she was serious about making meaningful changes. At her first council meeting, she tackled blatant sexism among her male-dominated council members, insisting that "all sexist terminology" be removed from future government documents and proposals, which they were.[405] With her support, a group of like-minded women also established the first rape crisis center and home in Saginaw.[406]

Following the Second Vatican Council, a significant number of Women Religious and Priests entered the "political ministry," as long as their community and bishop agreed.[407] They ran for public offices, "transitioning from a primarily middle-class identification to the adoption of a new constituency and priority to be placed on justice and quality of life concerns for the disadvantaged and powerless."[408] These first Sister-politicians were typically former educators who, after enthusiastically studying the documents of the Second Vatican Council, made political office, primarily at the local or state levels, their new social justice arena, believing that they could

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[404] Platte, "Public Office," 277.
[405] Ibid.
[406] Ibid.
[407] Second Vatican II's document, *Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World),* the Synod of Bishops' 1971 letter, "Justice in the World," and Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation, *Evangelica Testification,* were the main documents that Sisters looked to when justifying their political social justice activism, including holding public office. Christina Schenk, "Catholic Sisters Helped Pioneer Today's 'Pink Wave,'" *National Catholic Reporter,* November 15, 2018, https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/simply-spirit/catholic-sisters-helped-pioneer-todays-poink-wave; For clergy holding political office, see: "History of Clergy in Congress," Pew Research Center, https://www.pewforum.org/2015/01/05/history-of-clergy-in-congress/; William Silverman, "The Exclusion of Clergy from Political Office in American States: An Oddity in Church-State Relations, *Sociology of Religion,* Vol. 61, No. 2, (Summer 2000), 223-230;
[408] Madonna Kolbenschlag, ed., *Between God and Caesar: Priests, Sisters and Political Office in the United States* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 12-15.

best engender changes in society by engaging with the politics of the day.[409] For many Women Religious, "it became obvious that political ministry was (and is) an important means of advocating on behalf of those made poor."[410]

Within a decade of the emergence of Sister and Priest politicians in the United States, conflicts arose. The Vatican and some bishops demanded that Sisters and Priests resign their political positions or forfeit their religious status within their respective communities.[411] The 1983 Canonical Code, issued by John Paul II, strictly forbade priests from seeking political office.[412] While some Sisters continued serving in public office, noting that the decree was for priests only, the Vatican eventually ordered that all Religious remove themselves from any political post, declaring that political positions were "unbecoming to their [religious] state."[413] Exceptions in the United States were granted by some bishops and Superiors, leading to great confusion within many religious communities.[414] While the Vatican refused to grant any exclusions in cases brought to its attention, "jurisdictional conflicts" occurred, for example, when a superior granted consent for her community members to participate in politics in one jurisdiction, but a superior in another jurisdiction forbade such activity.[415]

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[409] Madonna Kolbenschlag, ed., *Between God and Caesar,* 12-15.
[410] Christina Schenk, "Catholic Sisters Helped Pioneer Today's 'Pink Wave,'" *National Catholic Reporter,* November 15, 2018, https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/simply-spirit/catholic-sisters-helped-pioneer-todays-pink-wave.
[411] Priests were also ordered to leave their political offices. Fr. Robert Drinan was a "five-term U.S. Congressman from Cambridge, Massachusetts," who political ministry "had been sanctioned by Pope Paul VI, the U.S. episcopate, the cardinal of Boston and his own Jesuit superior." In 1980, he was ordered to resign his position by Pope John Paul II because of his voting record on abortion, which was viewed as, "too soft." Christina Schenk, "Catholic Sisters Helped Pioneer Today's 'Pink Wave,'" *National Catholic Reporter,* November 15, 2018, https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/simply-spirit/catholic-sisters-helped-pioneer-todays-pink-wave.
[412] "Apostolic Constitution, *Sacrae Disciplinae Leges,* of the Supreme Pontiff Pope John Paul II for the Promulgation of the New Cod of Canon Law," Vatican, January 25, 1983. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_25011983_sacrae-disciplinae-leges.html; Henry Tanner, "Pope's Wish Is Seen In Curb On Drinan: Pontiff Reportedly Sought Order Barring Sixth Term in House," *The New York Times,* May 6, 1980.
[413] Ibid.
[414] "Code of Canon Law," The Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann208-329_en.html#TITLE_III.
[415] Ibid. Some Women Religious chose to leave their orders rather than vacate their political offices. For example, Sr. Agnes Mary Mansour, chose to leave her Congregation in 1983 "after some Catholics disagreed with her appointment

Arguing that John Paul's decree did not apply to Women Religious, because women "don't even exist in Canon Law," Sister Platte remained resolute in her determination to continue serving the residents of Saginaw.[416] She noted that "I have a commitment to the people of Saginaw," and became aware "of how important it is to bring about change in systems and structures that affect whole nations and communities."[417] Platte refused to budge and remained in office until 1985, when she turned her anti-nuclear weapons activism into a full-time vocation.[418]

While Sister Platte began protesting nuclear weapons during her tenure as a Saginaw Councilwoman, it was only when she left her office in 1985 that she began a full-time vocation in teaching about and protesting nuclear war. After Wurtsmith and K.I. Sawyer Air Force Bases in Michigan were closed in the mid-1990s, she and Sister Gilbert moved to Jonah House in Baltimore, Maryland, to better serve the antinuclear weapons movement, while Sister Hudson moved to the state of Washington to minister there.

Established in 1973 by the Catholic priest, Philip Berrigan, Sister Elizabeth McAlister, and other Catholic activists, Jonah House is a faith-based community with strong roots in the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church and the Catholic Worker movement of Dorothy Day.[419]

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as head of Michigan's Department of Social Services on the grounds that slightly less than 1 percent of the budget was designated form Medical abortions." Margaret M. McGuinness, *Called to* Serve, 178; Sr. Arlene Violet left her order rather than abandon her candidacy for Attorney General of Rhode Island, stated that her political involvement was "an extension, of her religious vow and that "What the decision came down to was being a Sister of Mercy in name only, or being a Sister of Mercy in reality." "2 Nuns Who Quit Order Defend Political Role," *The New York Times,* May 6, 1984;

[416] "Papal Law Won't Strip Nun's Political Habit." *The Grand Rapids Press,* May 7, 1980.

[417] Ibid.

[418] It is assumed the Sister Ardeth Platte received an exclusion from Bishop of Saginaw and the Superior of Marywood.

[419] For Dorothy Day, see: William Thorn and Phillip, ed., *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement: Centenary Essays,* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2001); Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing), 1987; Anne Klejment, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic* Worker (New York: Garland), 1986; Nancy L. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1985); William D. Miller, *Dorothy Day: a Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982); William D. Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973); In 1963, Tom Cornell and Christ Kearns, members of the Catholic Worker Movement, picketed in front of the South Vietnamese representative to the United Nations in protest over South Vietnam's repression of Buddhist Monks. Cornell and Kearns were also one of the first activists to burn their draft cards. Nepstad, 45. Eric Schlosser, "Break-In At Y-12," *The New Yorker,* March 9, 2015, 3.

Day, an ardent pacifist, organized protests against the draft, the Vietnam War, and nuclear weapons. She "provided a living model of how to turn one's faith into radical political action."[420] Phil Berrigan remarked that, "More than any other institution or individual, the Catholic Worker movement influenced [my brother] Dan and me, especially with its tradition of nonviolent direct action."[421]

Jonah House members initially lived in a row house in one of Baltimore's poorest neighborhoods until the mid-1990s, when they made an arrangement to restore and maintain the extensive abandon grounds of St. Peter's Cemetery in Baltimore in exchange for living in the buildings that occupied the property. After Jonah House community members cleared the twenty-two-acre cemetery, alone a massive endeavor, they established a home for like-minded nonviolent activists to take part in retreats, attend religious services, and help feed the poor on a weekly basis.[422]

In the 1970s, peace activists, including Jonah House members, directed their activism towards protesting the Vietnam War.[423] After the war ended in the mid-1970s, many activists left the peace movement. During the early years of the Reagan Administration, with Reagan's hawkish stance towards the Soviet Union and push to increase the nation's stockpile of nuclear weapons, many activists returned and the American anti-nuclear movement reached its peak.[424] President

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[420] Marian Mollin, "Communities of Resistance: Women and the Catholic Left of the Late 1960s," *The Oral History Review,* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer-Autumn, 2004), 33.
[421] Phil Berrigan eventually married Sister Elizabeth McAlister and was excommunicated by the Church, which later reversed its excommunication. Nepstad, 39.
[422] Eric Schlosser, "Break-In At Y-12: How a Handful of Pacifists and Nuns Exposed the Vulnerability of America's Nuclear Weapons Sites," *The New Yorker,* March 9, 2015.
[423] For the American Peace Movement, see: Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1933-1983* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984); Charles Chatfield, *The American Peace Movement; Ideals and Activists* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992); John Lofland, *Polite Protestors: the American Peace Movement of the 1980s* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993).
[424] Schlosser, 6. Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 8-9,21, 25-32.

Reagan's remarks about a possible limited nuclear war and his constant demands for increased military spending from Congress, designed to build up the country's store of nuclear weapons, fueled the opposition.[425] When he argued, that "tyranny cannot be stopped with words alone," and that the United States refused to "become weaker," he sparked large demonstrations throughout the country. As many as one million people, including Sister Platte, attended a rally in Central Park in June 1982, demanding nuclear disarmament.[426] While Jonah House members' role in the in the new "freeze movement, was limited, they "decided to take a stand against the government's policies along with what they saw as "the church's silence" in light of the massive buildup of nuclear weapons.[427]

Religious groups, including the Catholic Church, and in particular Catholic peace activists, lent their considerable resources to help establish a formidable antinuclear weapons movement in the 1980s.[428] The Catholic Church, with its 51 million followers, "constituted the largest denomination in the United States," which had historically been "quite hawkish," during the majority of the twentieth century.[429] The Catholic Church's position in the United States began to swing towards promoting a more moderate attitude towards nuclear weapons during the Vietnam War, with United States Bishops vocally, and sometimes vehemently, opposing nuclear weapons and the increased threat of a nuclear war. By 1982, almost 60 Bishops in the United States were members of the international Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi.

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[425] "Reagan Remark Stirs European Furor," *The Washington Post,* October 21, 1981.
[426] "Transcript of Reagan's U.N. Speech on the Nuclear Arms Race," *The New York Times,* June 18, 1982; "Reagan Clarifies His Statements On Nuclear War," *The New York Times,* October 22, 1983; Nepstad, 57.
[427] Wittner,180-183; Schlosser, 6; Nepstad, 57.
[428] Lawrence S. Wittner, *Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8-9, 21, 25-32.
[429] Wittner, 180.

In 1983, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released a pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace.*[430] While still maintaining its Just War theory, and that the possession of nuclear weapons must be temporary, they expressed distaste for the arms race and declared that, "we feel that our world and nation are heading in the wrong direction."[431] Prior to its release, however, Pope John Paul II summoned the authors of the pastoral letter to the Vatican to review the drafts of the letter.[432] John Paul's deep political and cultural conservativism resonated with President Reagan, which allowed the two to "influence the nature and content of the U.S. bishops' approach to nuclear weapons" and their pastoral letter.[433] The letter "had significant changes in both language and substance," watering down the final version of the draft.[434] Regardless, "many in the Catholic press hailed the pastoral's release as an important moment, a 'watershed event in the history of the Catholic Church.'"[435] Cardinal Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI), hailed it as an "historic event," and that "U.S. Catholics had displayed a new consciousness of their

[430] The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 was a cause of concern for U.S. bishops. Reagan's promise of building up the country's stockpile of nuclear weapons "had not gone unnoticed by the Catholic bishops of the United States." Jared McBrady, "The Challenge of Peace: Ronald Reagan, John Paul II, and the American Bishops," *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Vol. 17, no. 1, (Winter 2015), 129-152.
[431] Wittner, 180; "The Challenge of Peace: The U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace," *The Furrow,* Vol. 34, no. 8, (August, 1983), 485-491; David E. Anderson, "Catholic Bishops Letter Proposes Nuclear Freeze," October 25, 1982, UPI Archives, https://www.upi.com/Archives/1982/10/25/Catholic-bishops-letter-proposes-nuclear-freeze/9014404366400/.
[432] Biographies of John Paul II, include: Barnard O'Conner, *Papal Diplomacy: John Paul II and the Culture of Peace,* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2005); George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliffstreet Books, 1999); Stephanie Mar Brettman, *Theories of Justice; A Dialogue With Karol Wojtyla/John Paul II and Karl Barth* (Eugene Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014); Jeffery Tranzillo, "*John Paul II on the Vulnerable* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2013); Richard Spinello, *The Encyclicals of John Paul II; An Introduction and Commentary* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers) 2012.
[433] Wittner, 180.
[434] For example, the final draft, while criticizing the United States and the Soviet Union, "strengthened criticisms of the Soviet Union from earlier drafts, calling the Soviet behavior in some cases 'reprehensible.'" McBrady, 150. In his essay, The Challenge of Peace: Ronald Reagan, John Pall II, and the American Bishops, notes that "[a]lthough claims of direct causation are unsubstantiated, the influence of the Vatican seemed to weigh heavily in the revisions of *The Challenge of Peace."* McBrady, 151. There was a minority of bishops who wanted an even weaker letter. McBrady, 149.
[435] Ibid, 149-150.

strength in the United States and of their social responsibilities."[436] Many mainstream Catholics agreed and joined the freeze movement, giving it a significant boost in strength and numbers.[437]

As noted earlier in this chapter, Plowshare's activists vociferously opposed the Catholic Church's constantly evolving position towards the United States policy of deterrence and the country's growing stockpile of nuclear weapons. Plowshare's activists looked for ways to make a bold statement, one that would combine faith with action. Their actions, however, would differ significantly from the mainstream nuclear freeze movement, which used tactics such as "leafletting, attending marches, circulating petitions, and working for new legislation."[438] The mainstream movement did not use direct action.[439] Further, activists in the freeze movement were calling for Reagan to stop the arms race, not abolish nuclear weapons, nor for "the dismantling of a permanent war economy."[440]

On September 9, 1980, two members of Jonah House and six other antinuclear war activists committed what would eventually be recognized as the first Plowshares action. Breaking into the General Electric Nuclear Missile Re-Entry Division in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, the activists hammered on two nose cones for the Mark 12 missile warheads. Then, after pouring blood on documents, they "prayed for peace." They called their action, "The Plowshares Eight," after

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[436] Ibid.
[437] Wittner, 180.
[438] Ibid.
[439] On the American Nuclear Freeze Movement, see: Henry Richard Maar, "The Lost Years: The American Peace Movement from Vietnam to Nuclear Freeze, *Peace and Change*, Vol. 44, no. 3, (July 2029); Howard Richards, "Learning from the American Nuclear Freeze Movement of 1981-1984, *Peace and Conflict,* Vol. 6, no. 1, (March 2000); Angela Santese, "Ronald Reagan, the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign and the Nuclear Scare of the 1980s," *International History Review,* Vol. 39, no. 3, (May 2017); David S. Meyer, *A Winter of Discontent: The Nuclear Freeze and American Politics,* (New York: Praeger, 1990); William M. Knoblauch, *Nuclear Freeze in a Cold War: The Reagan Administration, Cultural Activism and the End of the Arms Race* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2017).
[440] Schlosser, 6.

the eight members in their group. This protest, which landed the members in jail, was intended to be a one-time action.[441]

Three months later, however, Jonah House resident, Peter DeMott, attended the christening of the *USS Baltimore,* a fast-attack submarine, at the General Dynamics Electric Boat shipyard, in Groton, Connecticut. While the vast majority of Plowshares' actions were meticulously planned in advance, DeMott, after seeing a Trident submarine out of the water, and guarded only flimsy by snow fencing, spontaneously jumped into a nearby General Dynamics work van that still had the keys in the ignition. After rolling up the windows and locking the doors, he backed the van over the snow fence near the rudder of the submarine. .[442]Driving the van a few feet from the submarine, he "backed it very forcefully into the rudder." Then shifting gears, and pulling forward, he "floored it again . . . four or five times," and "kept about [his] business," until security forces smashed the van window with a two-by-four and pulled him out of the van.[443] The first two Plowshares actions garnered a great deal of media attention resulting in galvanizing the freeze movement with other peace organizations parroting their actions. Other plowshares campaigns quickly followed. In total, there have been over eighty Plowshares actions, including some in Europe, by members of the movement. The majority of Plowshares actions, however, took place in the 1980s and 1990s.[444]

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[441] Their legal case lasted almost ten years and eventually made its way to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court and then the U.S. Supreme Court which refused to hear Pennsylvania's appeal after their case was overturned. "Plowshares History," *Kings Bay Plowshares Seven,* https://kingsbayplowshares7.org

[442] Plowshares Eight Members. Photo courtesy of *Waging Nonviolence: People Powered News & Analysis.* https://wagingnonviolence.org/2010/09/the-plowshares-8-thirty-years-on/.

[443] Ibid; Nepstad, 58-59.

[444] Activists who choose to participate in a Plowshares action do not need to be members of the Jonah House community, but must be committed to its nonviolence community and to each other. "Plowshares History," *Kings Bay Plowshares Seven,* https://kingsbayplowshares7.org/about/.

Fig. 3.5 Members of the Plowshares Eight.[445]

To further assist their anti-nuclear weapons ministries, and to support other faith-based communities committed to social justice, Jonah House community members established networks with other organizations, such as *Sojourners,* a group of Christians who "work together to live a gospel life that integrates spiritual renewal and social justice," and Ground Zero Center for Nonviolence communities, which protests nuclear weapons, especially Trident nuclear submarines, in the state of Washington, of which Sister Jackie Hudson was a member.[446]

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[445] Plowshares Eight Members. Photo courtesy of *Waging Nonviolence: People Powered News & Analysis.* https://wagingnonviolence.org/2010/09/the-plowshares-8-thirty-years-on/.

[446] Ibid; Nepstad, 58-59; Ground Zero Center for Nonviolence Action's website states that they offer "the opportunity to explore the meaning and practice of nonviolence from a perspective of deep spiritual reflection, providing a means for witnessing to and resisting all nuclear weapons, especially Trident. We seek to go to the root of violence and injustice in our world and experience the transforming power of love through nonviolent action." Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action https://www.gzcenter.org/.

Plowshares actions typically involve activists "trespassing onto the land of the military or government contractors and symbolically disarming nuclear weapons systems—missile silo doors or nuclear bombers—by hitting them with household hammers or pouring their own blood onto them."[447] What distinguishes Plowshares activists from other peace groups is that most Plowshares activists are Catholic. They are driven by the intersection of their faith and the desire for social justice, which often leads to actions that are highly symbolic. Hammers used to pound on weapons represent the Biblical maxim to "beat their swords into plowshares," and the blood, usually their own, typically represents the death and destruction caused by weapons and war. It also represents the activist's willingness to sacrifice his or her life in the deployment of a Plowshares.[448]

Courtrooms also take on great symbolism and significance for Plowshare's activists, as trials become another venue for activists to draw attention to the actions of the United States government. Plowshare's activists maintain that the United States, in producing, storing, and threatening to use nuclear weapons, is breaking international law. They "argue that their efforts at disarmament are justified based on a divine or higher law and their understanding of international law."[449] Judges and prosecutors, however, rarely allow defense attorneys to use these arguments, "portraying Plowshare's appeals to God and religion," as inconsequential to their illegal actions and more "of a distraction."[450]

Furthermore, although Plowshare's activists do not want to spend time in prison, they consider jail time and prison sentences an extension of their ministry to the dispossessed. For example, while Sister Platte was incarcerated at the Danbury Federal Correction Institution in

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[447] Ibid. As stated earlier in this chapter, not all Plowshares' activists use blood as a symbol, and those who do may have different meanings behind the use of blood. For Catholics who use blood symbolically, it usually represents the redeeming blood of Jesus.
[448] Ibid.
[449] Nepstad, 58-59.
[450] Ibid.

Connecticut, she ministered to women of all faiths, advocated "against the unfair sentencing of mostly poor women of color, and helped fellow inmates with their education." While at Danbury, she met Piper Kerman, who wrote about her prison experience in her book, *Orange is the New Black,* later turned into a Netflix series. In the comedy, Sister Platte is portrayed by a fictional character, Sister Ingalls, by the actor Beth Fowler.[451] *Orange is the New Black* turned Platte into a pop icon of sorts and brought a great deal of attention to Sister Platte. She typically deflected the attention, redirecting conversations to the needs of the antinuclear weapons movement or the need for prison reform in the United States. In an interview for *The National Catholic Reporter*, Platte said of *Orange is the New Black*, "They put words in my mouth I would never say . . . I mean, even in the book where Piper says I tied myself to a flagpole. False! I went into a missile silo!"[452] Having never seen an episode of the *Netflix* comedy, she still recommended reading Kerman's book for its accurate depiction of prison life and the need for prison reform, a cause for which she and Sisters Gilbert and Hudson advocated.[453]

Between Sisters Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson, the three women participated in four Plowshares actions. A year after Sisters Platte and Gilber moved to Jonah House in 1995, they participated in their first Plowshares action, "Weep for Children Plowshares," with two other women, Sister Elizabeth Walters, I.H.M., and a Dorothy Day Catholic Worker member, Kathy

[451] Piper Kerman, *Orange is the New Black* (London: Abacus Publishing, 2013); Jamie Manson, "The Nun and the Actress Behind 'Orange is the New Black," *National Catholic Reporter,* June 10, 2015, http://www.ncronline.org/print/blogs/grace-margins/nun-and-actress-behind-orange-new-black.
[452] Manson, "The Nun and the Actress Behind 'Orange is the New Black."
[453] Ibid.

Fig. 3. 6. Beth Fowler, first row, left, portrayed Sister Ingalls who was based on Sister Platte, in Netflix's *Orange is the New Black.* [454]

Boylan.[455] On July 27, 1996, the women walked into the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Connecticut, home to nuclear submarines, and poured their blood on a torpedo test cylinder, performed a "liturgical dance" on top of a submarine, and hammered on a test cylinder.[456] Reflecting on the name chosen for their action, Platte noted that "We weep because we love so deeply and feel so strongly and the weeping calls us to action."[457] She also reflected on the religious nature of their actions stating that,

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[454] *Orange is the New Black.* Photo courtesy of Netflix.

[455] "Plowshares History: A History of the Plowshares Movement—A Talk with Art Lafflin," October 22, 2029, https://kingsbayplowshares7.org/plowshares-history/; Rosalie G. Riegle, *Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family, and Community* (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012); Gerald Renner, "Pre-Dawn Protesters Target Navy Base," *Hartford Courant,* July 28, 1996, https://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-xpm-1996-07-28-9607290528-story.html.

[456] For information on the Naval submarine base in Connecticut, see https://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrma/installations/navsubbase_new_london/about/history.html.

[457] Riegle, 130.

> we have come to believe that liturgy isn't just at church. It's not separated from our lives. Every liturgy has two parts. The first is proclaiming the Word. All the way through our action, we were conscious of proclaiming the Word, proclaiming truth. Secondly, we were entering into the second part, the Eucharist. In this action, we began to understand deeply that (the) Eucharist is our own lives. That we—our body, our blood—must be given for peace in the world. We knew there could be grave consequences.[458]

The group was arrested and tried for trespassing and "willful injury to government property," at the U.S. Federal Court in Hartford. Despite the prosecutor claiming that the women "must be stopped because they are just like the Oklahoma City Bomber," they were sentenced to 1,000 hours of community service. Given that community service was a regular aspect of the Sisters' ministries, it is not a stretch to argue that they were not seriously hindered by the sentence.

Platte and Gilbert's second Plowshares action, Gods of Metal, took place in 1998, at Andrews Airforce Base in Maryland. They were joined by Fr. Frank Cordaro and Kathy Boylan. They distributed "explanatory leaflets and poured blood and hammered on the missile hatches of a B-52 bomber," while hundreds of spectators looked on.[459] Sisters Platte and Gilbert and Fr. Cordaro received four months in prison for their actions and Boylan received ten months because of her lengthy record.[460]

Sister Hudson joined Sisters Platte and Gilbert on their third and fourth Plowshares actions. On September 9, 2000, the three Sisters, along with two other Sisters from other religious orders, entered Petersen Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado, during the Defense Department's "Spring 2000 Open House and Air Show." For this action they met "for three or four days at a time to retreat and study. We read *Vision for 2020,* the official US Air Force document that calls for exploitation of outer space and domination of other nations from there . . . So we decided to

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[458] Ibid, 132.
[459] Ibid, 133.
[460] Ibid.

ring the bell to wake the nation to what's happening."[461] While thousands of spectators were in attendance, the Sisters approached an F-8 Hornet fighter jet, the type used in Iraq, and poured blood on the jet's system's communicator. Not wanting to support the federal government in any way, they refused to pay bond after their arrest. They were released from jail a week later on a technicality.[462]

Sisters Hudson, Gilbert, and Platte returned to Colorado, Site N8, in 2002 for their Sacred Earth and Space Plowshares II action, discussed in the beginning this chapter. This action resulted in the Sisters' longest prison sentence. After the Sisters were arrested and taken into custody, they were brought to the Women's Detention Center in Greeley, Colorado, where they spent the next ten days awaiting their initial hearing. At the hearing in Denver, on October 16, they were charged with destruction of government property. Further charges of sabotage, "Injury and obstruction of National Defense of the United States," were added later, which meant they could face twenty years behind bars.[463] Prior to their trial, the judge, Robert E. Blackburn, a George W. Bush appointee, granted the federal prosecutor an *in limine* motion, prohibiting the defense to argue moral, religious, or legal justification for the Sisters' actions.[464] During the trial, an Air Force officer testified that the Sisters "did not damage the missile, its warhead or its mission." Despite the testimony of the Air Force officer, the trio was found guilty for "injury or obstruction of National Defense materials," and for "depredation of government property," in excess of $1,000. Sister Hudson was given a thirty-month sentence; Sister Gilbert a thirty-three-month sentence, and Sister Plate received the longest sentence of forty-one months. They were ordered to pay $3,080.04

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[461] Ibid, 133-134.
[462] Erin Emery, "Nuns Who Hammered Jet Refuse to Post Bail," *The Denver Post,"* September 15, 2000. https://denverpost.com/news/news0915h.htm.
[463] Riegle, 136.
[464] The judge also prohibited from calling "expert witnesses, to present as evidence the documents left at the site, or to use sixty words listed as off-limits to them." Riegle, 136.

restitution.[465] When Sister Platte was also forced to take a class about accountability to victims of crimes, she the rhetorical question, "My victim is hurting? The United States Air Force is hurting?"[466] The high financial charges and long sentences of Plowshares actions are almost always disproportionate to the damage inflicted to the nuclear weapons sites. Often, what is needed to repair the damage of a Plowshares action is a bucket of cheap paint. Needless to say, the charges reflected the growing hostility with which such actions were met.[467]

After Sisters Platte, Gilbert, and Hudson were released from prison, they continued participating in radical acts of civil disobedience, despite the prospect of being incarcerated with even longer sentences due to their criminal records. In 2010, along with nearly a dozen other activists, they were arrested for trespassing on the grounds of the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, but not committing any property damage.[468] Home to one of the largest buildings in the world, the Y-12 site manufactures and stores the United States' stockpile of weapons-grade of uranium.[469] The Sisters were given relatively short sentences for this non-Plowshares action—four months. While awaiting sentencing in jail, Sister Jackie became seriously ill. After multiple attempts by fellow prisoners, her lawyer, and friends and family to get her adequate medical care in the jail, she was eventually transported from to a hospital, where she was diagnosed with pneumonia. Given permission to travel to her home in Washington before

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[465] Ibid.
[466] Riegle, 138.
[467] This was particularly true under the George W. Bush administration, which intended to strengthen its nuclear domination, especially after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb: Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971-Present* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2003); 480-481.
[468] This action is not considered a Plowshares action, but one of many protests the Sisters engaged in that did not require extensive planning or the getting near nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, these "lesser" actions do result in charges, typically of trespassing. Given the Sisters extensive criminal record a misdemeanor trespass charge still landed the Sisters with jail time.
[469] Schlosser, 1.

sentencing because of her frail health, she was diagnosed with cancer and died in 2012 before she could serve her sentence.[470]

In 2017, Sisters Gilbert and Platte moved from Baltimore to the Catholic Worker Home in Washington, D.C, to make way for a younger generation of activists at Jonah House.[471] Despite the Sisters increasing age, Sister Gilbert, 70, and Sister Platte, 81, the Sisters did not slow down. Rather, they began a demanding crisscross tour of the country speaking on behalf of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and its proposal for an international legally binding treaty banning nuclear weapons. In July 2017, Sisters Gilbert and Platte spent two weeks at the United Nations as ICAN delegates, negotiating for the treaty's passage.[472]

ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, was established in Australia in 2006 by members of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and the Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW), as a "campaigning vehicle" to abolish all nuclear weapons[473] Building a broad and diverse coalition of almost 500 peace organizations from over one hundred countries, including social justice, indigenous, environmental, and faith organizations, ICAN led the campaign efforts to draft a ban treaty, resulting in "122 United Nations member countries" accepting a draft agreement on an international legal binding prohibition of nuclear weapons."[474] The Treaty on the Prohibition of

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[470] "Sister Inspiration: Jackie Hudson, O.P. Grand Rapids Dominicans, https://www.grdominicans.org/sister-inspiration-jackie-hudson/

[471]The Dorothy Day Catholic Worker House was established in the early 1980s and "has served as a house of hospitality for mostly single moms and their children from D.C., the U.S. and around the world. It has also been a school where those, inspired by the Catholic Worker vision, have learned about community, solidarity, Gospel nonviolence, resistance, patience, compassion, forgiveness and so much more, https://dccatholicworker.wordpress.com/about-2/

[472] "Sister Inspiration: Ardeth Platte, O.P., and Carol Gilbert, O.P., Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, https://www.grdominicans.org/sister-inspiration-ardeth-platte-and-carol-gilbert/

[473] Dimity Hawkins, Dave Sweeney and Tilman Ruff, "ICAN's Origins—From Little Things, Big Things Grow," ICAN, October 2019, 1. https://www.icanw.org-origins; International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN)-Facts," Nobel Prize, August 23, 2021, https://nobelprize/peace/2017/ican/facts/.

[474] Ibid,8.

Fig. 3. 7. Sisters Gilbert and Platte being arrested at the Pentagon.[475]

Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), "builds on the 1970 Nuclear Proliferation Treaty" and is a "legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons."[476] The treaty includes a set of prohibitions for signees. These include "undertakings not to develop, test, produce, acquire, possess, stockpile, use or threaten to use nuclear weapons."[477] Its ultimate goal is the eventual abolition of all nuclear weapons.[478] With the ratification of the 50th country in 2020, the Republic of Honduras, the treaty went into effect in January 2021.[479]

[475] Undated Photo. Courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[476] "Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons," United Nations: Office for Disarmament Affairs," https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/.
[477] The treaty also "prohibits the deployment of nuclear weapons on national territory and the provision of assistance to any State in the conduct of prohibited activities" and "obliges States parties to provide adequate assistance to individuals affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons, as well as to take necessary and appropriate measure of environmental remediation in areas under its jurisdiction or control contaminated as a result of activities related to the testing or use of nuclear weapons." "Treaty on the prohibition of nuclear weapons," United Nations: Office for Disarmament Affairs, https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/.
[478] Ibid.
[479] Ibid.

While at the United Nations as part of the ICAN treaty negotiating delegation, Sisters Gilbert and Platte wrote to their friends and fellow Dominican Sisters with palpable excitement that they had been meeting with "scientists, physicists, doctors . . . to see this treaty to completion."[480] Despite all the nuclear-capable states boycotting the conference, including the United States, Sister Platte remained hopeful and resolute. She understood that the vote "has to be seen as another step, though a crucial one, in a long journey by those who want to get rid of the weapons that threaten humanity and the planet." While at the United Nations, Sister Platte, speaking to a reporter, remarked "I am going to spend the rest of my life to get the U.S. on board this treaty."[481] Later that year, ICAN won the Nobel Peace Prize, "for its work to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and for its ground-breaking efforts to achieve a treaty-based prohibition of such weapons."[482] Sisters Gilbert and Platte shared in the Nobel Prize, travelling with the medal when they spoke on behalf of the treaty.

Sister Platte continued advocating relentlessly for the treaty and for the United States to sign it until she passed away on September 30, 2020. Four days earlier, she spoke to students at Boston University School of Theology on behalf of the treaty.[483] Despite Platte's death, Sister Gilbert continues her work on behalf of the TPNW, speaking to high school and college students around the country. In remarks that she wrote shortly after Sister Platte passed away, Sister Gilbert

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[480] "Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids at United Nations Assembly on Nuclear Weapons," June 28, 2017. http://www.grdominicans.org/dominican-sisters-fo-grand-rapids-at-united-nations-assembly-on-nuclear-weapons/.
[481] "Peace Activists Laud Nuclear Weapons Ban," Grand Rapids Dominicans, July 11, 2017.
[482] The Nobel Prize, "International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN): The Nobel Peace Prize," 2017. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2017/ican/facts/.
[483] "Ardeth Platte, Dominican Nun, dedicated to No-Nukes Cause, Dies at 84." Religion News Service, September 30, 2020.

declared that she would continue to "speak truth to power" and continue to "beat swords into plowshares." [484]

Fig. 3.8. Sisters Platte and Gilbert at the U.N., July 2017.[485]

Conclusion

Sisters Hudson, Gilbert, and Platte began their social justice activism immediately after the Second Vatican Council urged Women Religious to step beyond their convents, engage with the world, and address the pressing social issues of the day. From engaging in the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War and marching in the cause of civil rights, to working on behalf of farmworkers and domestic abuse survivors, the Sisters developed a social justice conscience rooted in the Gospels, the encyclicals of the Second Vatican Council, and pastoral letters of Popes and the bishops in the United States. Their early activism led them to the anti-nuclear weapons movement which they devoted the remaining years of their lives to the removal of all nuclear

[484] Ibid. The U.N. Treaty to Abolish Nuclear Weapons will be discussed later in this chapter; "Beating swords into plowshares," is from the Old Testament, Isiah 2:4 and to the four Plowshares' nonviolent antinuclear war community who agitate for the removal of nuclear weapons with civil disobedience actions.
[485] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.

weapons in the United States.[486] In committing radical acts of civil resistance at nuclear weapons bases, the Pentagon, and other sites throughout the United States they sought to draw attention to the dangers of nuclear weapons, but also the high financial cost of the weapons—billions of dollars spent yearly which could be used elsewhere in the cause of social reform.[487] For the Sisters, these radical acts of civil resistance were highly symbolic in nature, often reflecting the elements of the Catholic faith, such as the sacrifice and redemption of Jesus Christ. They also sought to pressure the Catholic Church to recognize the church's doctrine of Just War as an anathema to the Gospels, which speak of peace, not violence. Finally, they highlighted what they saw as the United States government's hypocrisy of condemning other countries for obtaining nuclear weapons, while simultaneously building up its own arsenal of weapons. For these reasons the Sisters were willing spend months, and even years, in prison. Their multiple prison sentences attest to their dedication to the prevention of a nuclear war and to the abolishment of all nuclear weapons from the United States and elsewhere. Scholars have traditionally minimized the role anti-nuclear weapons activists have played in the prevention of a nuclear war, owing that prevention to the doctrine of mutually assured destruction.

More recently, however, some scholars have argued that the "massive grassroots campaign that has mobilized millions of people around the globe," has, for the past seventy-five years led leaders to adopt policies of nuclear restraint, eventually reducing the number of nuclear

[486] Sister Carol Gilbert continues to advocate on behalf of the anti-nuclear weapons movement.
[487] By the late 1990s, the United States has spent approximately $5.5 trillion on nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons-related programs. This is considered a "conservative" figure as the United States government "has never tried to track all nuclear weapons costs either annually or over time and as a result, records in this regard are extremely spotty and in numerous instances non-existent." Stephen I. Schwartz, *The Hidden Costs of our Nuclear Arsenal: Overview of Project Findings,* June 30, 1998, https://www.brookings.edu/the-hidden-costs-of-our-nuclear-arsenal-overview-of-project-findings/. "Enough is Enough: Global Nuclear Weapons Spending 2019," ICAN, https://www.icanw.org/report_73_billion_nuclear_weapons_spending_2020.

weapons.[488] Gilbert, Plate, and Hudson's activism, and that of other peace organizations, "have done much to contribute to the widespread support nuclear disarmament enjoys among the general public," and to their most important achievement, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in January, 2021, which "bans the development, production and manufacture of nuclear weapons."[489] Recently reflecting on the passage of the Treaty, Sister Gilbert noted that,

> All of the efforts led by International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and the United Nations—and the individual voices who support this international initiative—have been focused on promoting peace and justice, on unveiling Truths that some would wish would remain hidden. We look with hope to the day when the USA will lay down its weapons and do its part for world peace. We also stand ready and committed to make sure that day arrives.[490]

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[488] Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Power of Protest: The Campaign Against Nuclear Weapons Was Not Simply An Ideological Movement; It Was A Potent Political Force," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists,* Vol. 60, No. 4 (July/August 2004), 20-26; Lawrence S. Wittner, "Will the Nuclear Powers Ever Be Willing to Forgo Their Nuclear Weapons?" *The Asia-Pacific Journal,* Vol. 19, No. 2, (February 15, 2021) 1-7.

[489] Lawrence S. Wittner, "Where is the Nuclear Abolition Movement Today?" *ETH Zürich, Center for Security Studies,* September 28, 2012, https://css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/153202; "Enough is Enough: Global Nuclear Weapons Spending 2019, ICAN, undated, https://www.icanw.org/report_73_billion_nuclear_weapons_spending_2020.

[490] Carol Gilbert, O.P., "We Celebrate Peace . . . And Commit to the Work Yet to Come," Dominican Sisters, Grand Rapids, January 22, 2021, https://www.grdominicans.org/we-celebrate-peace-and-commit-to-the-work-yet-to-come/.

CHAPTER FOUR: "IS SHE READY TO BE BURIED THERE?" GRAND RAPIDS DOMINICAN SISTERS IN LATIN AMERICA

Blindfolded, terrified, and forced to crouch face down on the floor of a 1980 Toyota Land Runner, fifty-two-year-old Jean Reimer and seventy-year-old Helen LaValley were certain they would never return to Acatenango, the Guatemalan village they called home. In late November 1981, the two Marywood Sisters, along with Father Jose Velasquez, (fondly called Padre Chepé) and Felix Argueta, a young seminarian, were returning from a ministerial conference in Panajachel, a city approximately 90 miles west of the capital, Guatemala City, when they were stopped at a military checkpoint and taken captive by armed military forces. After being driven to a secret military base, they were "roughed up," interrogated, tossed into separate small cement cells, and kept blindfolded for most of their captivity.[491] Three days later, word of the group's disappearance reached the Marywood Motherhouse in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Sisters at Marywood understood well that individuals who disappeared during Guatemala's long civil war were often found dead or counted as one of the tens of thousands of disappeared. Seldom did victims of military kidnappings survive their ordeal, which makes Reimer and LaValley's case unique.[492] Five days after their abduction and after much pressure from the U.S. State Department, multiple religious organizations, and individuals, Reimer, LaValley, Velasquez, and Argueta were

[491] It is difficult to know the extent of Reimer and LaValley's mistreatment while being held captive as neither spoke in great detail about the event afterward to protect Father Velasquez and Felix Argueta. They remained in Guatemala after the Sisters returned to the United States. Sister Reimer (and possibly Sister LaValley) was physically assaulted while in captivity. Sister Reimer also wrote about several attempted sexual assaults. Still, she did not detail in her written notes or interviews with the press and other Marywood Sisters, nor did she speak about the assault with me. Given the extremely sensitive nature of the assault, I did not approach the subject with her. What has been gleaned about her and LaValley's abduction comes from Reimer's handwritten notes shortly after her release, a confidential cassette recording of her experience made for the State Department, press reports, a video recorded interview in 2008 with Sister Mary Navarre, O.P., and my interview with her in 2021. The cassette recording was held in confidence until Sister Reimer permitted me to listen to it in October 2021. Sr. Jean Reimer audio tapes. Guatemala Folder, Marywood Archives, Dominicans at Grand Rapids. Interview with author, October 7, 2021.

[492] Interview of Sr. Jean Reimer by Sr. Mary Navarre, O.P., DVD.

released.[493] The two Sisters were flown back to the United States several days later to recover from their ordeal before embarking on other social justice ministries. At the same time, Velasquez and Argueta, as Guatemalan citizens, remained in Guatemala.[494]

The abduction of Sisters Reimer and LaValley was but one of numerous kidnappings and disappearances that occurred in Latin America during the last half of the twentieth century.[495] Some members of the Catholic Church, who were steeped in Catholic social teaching and Liberation Theology, challenged the entrenched and often violent social order in Latin America. They also confronted the conservative nature of the Latin American Catholic Church which had long supported authoritarian regimes and had neglected the poor and indigenous peoples.[496] Despite Pope John Paul II's 1979 strong injunction against priests' political activity and involvement in ideological movements, clergy and Women Religious, continued to work on behalf

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[493] Marywood Sisters, Sisters from other orders, and individuals wrote and called their congressmen and senators and the State Department urging them to find ways to press the Guatemalan government to release the Sisters. It is not known how the State Department worked to have Sisters Reimer and LaValley released. No doubt, the issue was delicate as the government of Guatemala did not admit to the kidnapping, but rather, blamed leftist forces.

[494] Sister Jean Reimer went on to minister in East Europe after the fall of communism and in France. Sister Helen LaValley embarked on anti-nuclear war/weapons activism, even spending time in federal prison for her activism.

[495] In Central America, in particular, "the persecution of the church was common to the dictatorial regimes of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala." Sergio Palencia-Frener, "Memory and forgetting in Guatemala: Catholic Church Sets the War Record Straight," Open Democracy, June 6, 2021, https://wwwopendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/memory-and-forgetting-in-guatemala-catholic-church-sets-war-record-straight/; Hilary Goodfriend, "30 Years Ago Today in El Salvador, US-Trained Soldiers Murdered 6 Priests in Cold Blood," Jacobin, November, 2019, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/11/el-salvador-murders-jesuits-uca-school-of-the-americas; Richard Boudreaux and Marjorie Miller, "Six Jesuit Priests Slain in El Salvador," *Los Angeles Times,* November 17, 1989

[496] Chomsky, 96; In some Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Chile, Catholic churches supported democratization, but in others, notably in Argentina, they were less reluctant to do so. Some scholars argue that the "Catholic Church came on strong in support of the politically and economically oppressed in those countries where it saw its mass base threatened by Protestant incursions. Its policies were less unequivocally populist or democratic where rivals in the religious marketplace were not so much in evidence." Other scholars, especially David Martin, argue that along with denominational competition, the reluctance of the church to criticize authoritarian regimes "was at least as much a response to the presence of lapsed Catholic zealots among tercermundistas ("third-worlders") and urban guerillas, who were considered religious dissidents and possibly fanatics." Peter McDonough, *The Journal of Religion,* Vol. 79, No. 1 (Jan., 1999), 138-139; see also, Anthony Gill, *Rendering Unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

of Latin American's poorest, angering conservative forces in Latin America.[497] In response to the Jesuits political activity in the United States, and especially in Central America, in September of 1979, John Paul II ordered the Superior General of the Jesuits to oversee Jesuits around the world to end what he saw as "their regrettable shortcomings."[498] He also warned them against "secularizing tendencies" and to practice "doctrinal orthodoxy in full fidelity to the supreme magisterium of the church and the Roman Pontiff."[499] Catholic activists, including Women Religious, however, continued to challenge John Paul II's orders, especially after the assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero in 1980 and the deaths of twenty-six mourners at Romero's funeral, which further galvanized activists who continued to agitate for social justice.[500]

At the heart of Catholic activists' continued disobedience of the Pope's and some bishops' orders to refrain from political activism were the differing interpretations between progressives and conservatives regarding the Second Vatican Council, a controversial issue that still troubles the Catholic Church today.[501] Progressive Catholics at the time, including many Women Religious,

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[497] The liberalizing period in Catholicism which began with the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s, was reined in by Pope John Paul II (1978-2005). For biographies of John Paul II, see George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II—The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* (New York: Image Books, 2010; Meg Greene, *John Paul II: A Biography* (Greenwood Press, 2003); Kerry Walters, *John Paul II: A Short Biography* (Franciscan Media, 2013.

[498] Henry Tanner, "Pope's Wish Is Seen In Curb on Drinan: Pontiff Reportedly Sought Order Barring Sixth Term in House," *The New York Times,* May 6, 1980.

[499] Ibid.

[500] Ibid.

[501] Commentators have noted that Vatican II reinstated "an older, more collegial style in church style in church governance. Under the council's version of this teaching, known as collegiality, the papacy had the final word, but others in the church, from the bishops to the priests, and the laity, had a voice too." The bishops, however, failed to recognize "sufficiently with the resistance of entrenched bureaucracies—jealous of their authority and fearful of disorder—to change." For about fifteen years, collegiality was standard in 2013. Vatican, but with the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, "it began to more and more restricted," to the point that central control was highly tight, until the papacy of Francis, which began in 2013. John O'Malley, "Opening the Church to the World," *The New York Times,* October 10, 2012. See also, Denis M. Doyle, *The Catholic Church in a Changing World: A Vatican II Inspired Approach,* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academics, 2019); Blake Briton, *Reclaiming Vatican II: What It Means,* (Notre Dame, IN: Ava Maria Press, 2021); George Weigel, *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II—The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy* (New York: Image Books, 2010); Richard McBrien, "Pope Benedict on Vatican II," *The National Catholic Reporter,* February 23, 2009), http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/essays-theology/pope-benedict-vatican-ii.

argued that they had done exactly "what the documents of Vatican II and the writings of Pope Pius XII had asked—to respond to the needs of the twentieth century more effectively."[502] Women Religious were especially drawn to *Lumen Gentium* (1964) and *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), because these encyclicals "called Sisters to work with the poor in cooperation with clergy and laity; no longer placed clergy above laity; and defined the church as the "people of God."[503] Their confidence in their understanding of the encyclicals aided their agency to continue serving the most vulnerable populations in Latin America despite the opposition they faced. Conservative Catholics, argued that political activity was beyond the remit of religious orders and that activists were disobedient to the hierarchy of the Church, especially the pope who had ordered vowed religious to refrain from political activism.

Because authoritarian regimes perceived progressive Catholics' work with the poor as a threat, priests, Sisters, catechists, and other activists were kidnapped, tortured, and killed for their social justice activism. They were often accused of collaborating with leftist guerilla forces most often without explicit evidence. Most kidnappings and assassinations were carried out by authoritarian governments or by military or paramilitary forces. There was a significantly smaller number of abductions and murders attributed to guerilla forces.[504]

The United States government was also involved, directly or indirectly, in supporting authoritarian regimes in an effort to defeat communist forces in Latin America. These efforts involved state-sanctioned violence to which the US State Department and other agencies often turned a blind eye. In particular, the Regan administration "believed that Central America was a

[502] McGuinness, *Called to Serve,* 195.
[503] McGuiness, 162.
[504] It was common for authoritarian regimes to label social justice activists as communists, aiding and abetting leftist guerillas. Such labels provided a cover for military and authoritarian regimes' violence towards activists. Leftist guerrilla forces also committed kidnappings and assassinations but with far fewer victims.

principal arena in the cold war of the 1980s." Acting on the belief that the Soviet Union was building a communist stronghold in the region, the Reagan administration assisted anti-communist governments in Nicaragua and El Salvador, often using Honduras as a staging and training ground for military and security forces.[505] These actions followed a long history of the United States supporting right-wing governments in the region and directly intervening in their political and military affairs.

The kidnappings and murders of Catholic Religious in Latin America, especially those of American missionaries, have been covered to some extent by the press and by some scholars, with a few cases continuing to attract scholarly and media attention to this day.[506] By contrast, two of the few American victims to be located alive after having been disappeared**,** Sisters Jean Reimer

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[505] Meg Jacobs and Julian E. Zelizer, *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years, 1981-1989: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford St. Martins, 2011) 146. See also Walter LaFeber for his work on the United States involvement in Central America during the Cold War, in *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: WW Norton, 1984).

[506] Undoubtedly, the most covered case was that of the four women Catholic missionaries who were raped and killed in El Salvador in 1980. Movies, documentaries, and anniversary services continue to attract attention to this day. See, for example, Marian Mollin, "The Solidarity of Suffering: Gender, Cross-Cultural Contact, and the Foreign Mission Work of Sister Ita Ford," *Peace and Change*, Vol. 42, No. 2, April 2017; Edward T. Brett, Donna Whitson Brett, "The Spiritual Journeys of the Four Churchwomen," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Fall 2020, pp. 1-30; Theresa Keeley, "Thirty Years Later: Remembering the U.S. Churchwomen in El Salvador and the United States," *U.S. Catholic Historian,* Vol. 38, No. 4, Fall 2020, pp. 119-144; Penny Lemoux, et al, *Hearts on Fire: The Story of the Maryknoll Sisters* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995); Ana Carrigan, *Salvador Witness: The Life and Calling of Jean Donovan* (New York City: Ballantine Books, 1986); Martin Lange and Reinhold Iblacker, *Witness of Hope: The Persecution of Christians in America* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 1981); Jeanne Evans, ed., *Here I Am, Lord: The Letters and Writings of Ita Ford* (Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books, 2005); Eileen Markey, *A Radical Faith: The Assassination of Sister Maura* (New York: Nation Books, 2016); Gail Pellett, *Justice and the Generals,* (Brooklyn, New York: Icarus Films, 2002); Bernard Stone and Anna Carrigan, *Roses in December* (New York: First Run Features, 1982). Other cases received extensive coverage as well such as the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero and Oklahoma priest, Stanley Rother. Guatemalan priest, Luis Eduardo Pellecer Faena, who was kidnapped who mysteriously returned only to renounce his well-known social justice activism, also received a great deal of coverage. See Colman McCarthy, "A Good Man is Murdered—Does Anyone Care?" *The Washington Post,* November 21, 1981; "Around the World; 3 Seized in Guatemala Slaying of U.S. Priest," *The New York Times,* August 5, 1991; Lauren Jenkins, "Guatemalan Easter: Priest is Mourned," *The Washington Post,* April 11, 1982; "U.S. Priest Is Slain in Guatemala," *The New York Times,* July 29, 1981; Dan Bilefsky, "U.S. Priest Killed in 1981 Is Declared a Martyr," *The New York Times,* December 3, 2016; "Cry From Guatemala," *The New York Times,* August 15, 1981; Raymond Bonner, "Guatemalan Jesuit, Ex-Rebel, Now Preaches Rightist Cause," *The New York Times,* December 7, 1981, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/07/world/guatemala-jesuit-ex-rebel-now-preacehs-rightist-cause.htm; Marjory Hyer, "*Jesuits Say Guatemala Brainwashed Priest," The New York Times,* February 6, 1982, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/02/06/jesuits-say-guatemala-brainwashed-priest/74b7fbe7-4b35-4daf-b7d9-87d63d8b4aad/.

and Helen LaValley, did not sustain the attention of the press or scholars despite contemporary international coverage of their abduction and release.[507] Nor has the social justice activism, generally, of Catholic Women Religious in Latin America, which not only documented their agency, but often placed Sisters in extreme danger, received much attention outside a few Catholic histories and individual Catholic orders' publications, such as newsletters and blog posts.[508]

Because of the many connections Marywood Sisters had with other Catholic Religious orders serving in the region, especially with Maryknoll Sisters, they were also cognizant of the countless kidnappings, disappearances, and other dangers, which were not covered in the American press. In fact, by May of 1981, when Reimer and LaValley were kidnapped, at least nine Catholic priests were murdered in Guatemala that year alone.[509]

The main focus of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the Sisters' social justice activities and projects in Peru, Honduras, and Guatemala, and an account of Sisters Reimer and LaValley's kidnapping. Their ministries of teaching and nursing in Latin America prior to the Second Vatican Council and then their social justice activism after the Council, represents the Sisters' dedication to the Council's directives to go where they were needed the most, but also of the Sisters' agency despite the many barriers and threats they faced. The chapter also discusses the ways in which Liberation Theology manifested itself in Latin America and the challenges it presented to the Sisters considering Latin American governments' argument it was inherently

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[507] It is my understanding that Sisters Reimer and LaValley's kidnapping has not been examined in any academic publication. Author interview with Sister Jean Reimer, October 7, 2021.

[508] The exceptions are the Maryknoll Sisters, especially the murder of four Catholic Women Religious in El Salvador in 1980. The Grand Rapids Press briefly covered the deadly 1970 Peruvian earthquake and its impact on the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters serving there. Bernice Mancewicz, "GR Nuns Care for Injured: Radio Hams Report on Quake," *The Grand Rapids Press,* June 7, 1970; For works that discuss dangers that Sisters have faced see Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Nancy Lusignar, *Fire and Roses: The Burning of the Charleston Convent* New York: The Free Press, 2000).

[509] The reported number of priests murdered in Guatemala in 1981 ranges from six to ten. Chomsky, *Central America's Forgotten History,* 152.

communist in nature.[510] Not all the Sisters' work and activism in Latin America threatened the authority of governments or even the Church hierarchy but Sisters were continually threatened by other forces. This chapter also highlights the inherent difficulties and dangers Women Religious faced while ministering abroad. Complications and risks often came from living and working amidst violent dictatorial governments and simply being caught up in the violence engendered by authoritarian regimes and leftist forces. Precarious situations also came from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, landslides, hurricanes, floods, and droughts, which always impacted the poor communities where the Sisters ministered, more profoundly than wealthier regions.[511] Living in dangerous areas of the world were risks the Sisters were willing to make, even to the point of sacrificing their lives.

The willingness of some Marywood Sisters to suffer a martyr's death was not always shared by the congregation's prioresses or leadership teams who understood and supported the Sisters' work in Latin America. The leaders of the order believed they were responsible for protecting their Sisters no matter where they served or how vital their projects were. For Marywood's leadership team, then, and especially for the Prioresses, social activism became a precarious balancing act. They sought to attend to the needs of desperately poor communities, addressing severe structural inequalities, and at the same time guard the safety of their sisters. Before the Second Vatican Council and the Second Wave Feminist movement, both of which enabled greater independence among Women Religious, the decision for Sisters to remain in, or leave a dangerous situation, would simply have fallen on the Mother Superior. No questions asked.

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[510] By the time the Sisters were ministering in Honduras in the late 1990s, Liberation Theology had waned as a central ideological force throughout Latin America. This is largely due to the pontificate of John Paul II discussed later in this chapter. Francisco E. Gonzalez, "Latin America: Intense Religiosity and Absence of Anti-System Confessional Parties," *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 37, No. 15, (2017), 105-121.

[511] Often significant natural disasters which devastated poor communities more than wealthier regions, sparked later social justice activism to address the severe living inequalities in Latin America.

But, as noted in Chapter One, the Second Vatican Council and the 1970s Women's Movement shifted Catholic Sisters' attitudes from being women who, for the most part, obeyed directives, to women who developed independent social justice consciences and a sense of agency based on their faith. They relied increasingly on their own convictions, their ability to make sound decisions, and their reading the "signs of the times," that is, to go where they were needed. Such decision-making was a process that was not taken lightly, and often decisions to go to a dangerous missionary front often took months or years to make. The discernment process to send Marywood Sisters to Honduras in the late 1990s took over six years. Therefore, decisions to send a Sister, or leave a Sister, in a hazardous environment were made collaboratively between individual Sisters and the Marywood leadership team, but with the Sister usually having the last word.

Twentieth-Century Latin America

Twentieth-century Latin America was marked by political instability, social disorder, and extreme violence at the hands of authoritarian regimes, militaries, paramilitary forces, and leftist guerilla forces.[512] Despite some movement towards democratic forms of governments after World War II, fears of communism, mainly sparked by the Cuban Revolution in 1959, led to authoritarian and military regimes dominating numerous Latin American countries by the 1960s. These regimes brutally cracked down on activists, including many Catholic Religious, who agitated for social justice and structural changes for indigenous and poor populations.[513]

The Catholic Church in Latin America, having long supported conservative governments, the wealthy, and Latin America's struggle against communism, began to show cracks by the 1960s

[512] For the history of Latin America, see: Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America, Ninth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 2016).
[513] Avila Chomsky, *Central America's Forgotten History: Revolution, Violence, and the Roots of Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

and 1970s. The global Catholic Church emerged from the Second Vatican Council in 1965 as an institution that "supported democracy, human rights, and social change."[514] But some members of the Catholic Church both in Latin America and in the Vatican, remained committed to supporting conservative and even authoritarian governments in preference to democratic movements in the region. For Latin American clerics, Women Religious, and laymen and laywomen who sought to ease the suffering embedded in their societies, the importance of Vatican II cannot, however, be understated. Vatican II inspired some clerics in the Church hierarchy to "look more critically at their Church and the societies in which they lived," directly leading to the 1968 Latin American Bishop's Conference in Medellín, Columbia, and to the widespread adoption of Liberation Theology, which not only resonated throughout Latin America but in the United States and other countries, albeit to a lesser degree.[515]

At the conference in Medellín, progressive clerics looked at the Second Vatican Council's teachings, especially *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium,* through the lens of the social and economic conditions in Latin America.[516] The encyclicals of the Council highlighted "what had previously been marginal concepts: the church of the poor, and a church committed to the

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[514]As noted earlier, some Latin American countries did not give rise to authoritarian regimes. Brian Manewal, "Religion in the Trenches: Liberation Theology and Evangelical Protestantism as Tools of Social Control in the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996)," *McNair Scholars Journal:* Vol. II: no. 1 (2014), 52.

[515] Ibid. There has been much scholarly work on the Catholic Church in Latin America. For example, see Stephen JC Andes and Julia Young, *Local Church, Global Church: Catholic Activism in Latin America from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016); Emelio Betances, *The Catholic Church and Power Politics in Latin America* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman& Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Jorge I. Domínguez, ed., *The Roman Catholic Church in Latin America* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1994); Anthony James Gill, *Rendering Unto Caesar: The Catholic Church and the State in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); John Frederick Schwaller, *The History of the Catholic Church in Latin America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Frederick Shepherd, *The Politics of Transnational Actors in Latin America: Power From Afar* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2021).

[516] *Gaudium et Spes* reflected on the Church's responsibility in the world for non-Catholics and Catholics. "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html; *Lumen Gentium* proclaims all Baptized Catholics as the "people of God" and to minister throughout the world. "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," His Holiness Pope Paul VI, November 21, 1964. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

liberation and full flourishing of the needy and abandoned."[517] Arguing that the poor should not be seen as "passive recipients of historical forces," Medellín encouraged Catholics to be "subjects and protagonists" who should engage in "working towards a positive transformation of society."[518] It was a marked break from the past.

In 1971, Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian Dominican priest, who coauthored the principal documents of the Medellín Conference, wrote the formative text describing the radical transformation of some Catholic teaching in Latin America, coining the term, "Liberation Theology."[519] His work, *Teología de la Liberación* (*A Theology of Liberation*), noted that the majority of Latin Americans lived in extreme poverty because of the dependence of Latin American countries on Western powers. He also argued that "there can be authentic development for Latin America only if there is liberation from the domination exercised by the great capitalist countries, and especially by the most powerful, the United States of America."[520] Rather than developing diverse economies, Guiterrez argued that Latin American countries had become dependent on exporting their principal commodities to powerful western countries, especially the United States. This economic system was tightly controlled by elite ruling classes. It required a subordinated labor force which lived in poverty and inequality and acquiring extensive tracts of

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[517] Rafael Luciani, "Medellín Fifty Years Later: From Development to Liberation," *Theological Studies*: Vol. 79, no. 3 (2018), 566.

[518] Luciani, 568. For more on the 1969 Conference at Medellín, see also Manewal, "Religion in the Trenches," 52; Francisco Taborda, "The Medellín Conference and It's Reception of the Second Vatican Council," *Perspectiva Teológica* Vol. 51, No. 1, 2019; Cristobal Madero, "New Thinking About Catholic Education from Latin America: What the Bishops Said at Medellín, and Puebla," *International Studies in Catholic Education,* Vol. 10, No. 1 (January 2018).

[519] While the emergence of Liberation Theology is associated with the 1968 conference in Medellín, ideas about "an engaged Church focused on the poor and the transformation of 'this world,' had circulated since the early 1960s. Francisco E. Gonzalez, "Latin America: Intense Religiosity and Absence of Anti-System Confessional Parties," *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 37, No. 15, (2017), 115.
For works on Gutiérrez, see: Robert McAfee Brown, *Gustavo Gutiérrez,* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980); Marthe Hesselmans, *An Analysis of Gustavo Gutiérrez's A Theology of Liberation* (London: Routledge, 2017); Curt Cordette, (Oak Park, IL.: Meyer Stone Books, 1988); Vasilios Dimitriadis, "Gustavo Gutiérrez: Liberation Theology for a World of Social Justice and Peace," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* Vol. 54, no. 3 (2019), p 431-441.

[520] Manewal, "Religion in the Trenches," 54.

land to ensure the system functioned efficiently and without resistance from poor and indigenous populations.[521] The only way Latin Americans could free themselves from poverty and oppression, Gutiérrez argued, was by "a profound transformation, a *social revolution,* which will radically and qualitatively change," their condition.[522] Such teachings vastly expanded the meaning of mission for the church.

In a manner akin to the Second Wave Feminist movement's consciousness-raising strategy to reveal and challenge structural inequalities, Catholics who adhered to Liberation Theology sought to form small groups in their communities and enlighten the poor and affirm their inherent dignity and rights in spiritual *and* material ways. Catholic Religious, including the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters serving in Latin America, provided healthcare, pastoral services, and education, often through Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs, or Comunidades *ecclesial de base*) in the 1970s.[523] Base Ecclesial Communities became particularly popular after the Second Vatican Council and the Medellín Conference. They were implemented, in part, to address the decreasing numbers of priests, particularly in Central America, but more importantly, to draw lay Catholics into greater action within the Church and community.[524] Simply put, they were "small groups of people who (came) together to engage in liturgical activities to improve their living conditions and to improve society."[525] Base Ecclesial Communities "reinforced the idea that the Church was a community of equals,". . . and laity "could help use Bible study to raise peasants' consciousness about their poverty."[526] They helped to "revolutionize" women's consciousness, as women were

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[521] Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 17.
[522] Gutiérrez, 54.
[523] Sr. Jean Reimer, interview with author, October 7, 2021, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[524] In Guatemala alone, the number of priests "fell from six hundred in 1979 to three hundred" in only two years because priests had either fled the country or had been killed. Chomsky, 96.
[525] William Holden, "Post Modern Public Administration in the Land of Promise: The Basic Ecclesial Community Movement of Mindanao," *Worldviews, Environment, Culture, Religion,* Vol. 13, No. 2, (June 2009): 182.
[526] Chomsky, 58

frequently brought in to "undertake with the people some charge of the prayer life of the community," and other leadership positions.[527] Lay Catholics who were leaders in Base Ecclesial Communities often used their leadership and organization skills in the political realm, challenging governing bodies to address systemic poverty, racism, prejudice, lack of education and healthcare, while questioning the ownership of the vast tracts of land held by foreign companies and the wealthy.

For military leaders and authoritarian regimes fighting Leftist rebels, Liberation Theology was analogous to, and in collaboration with, communism. Its expansion of religious activism into the political realm was a significant threat to their authority as it stirred previously passive communities into action demanding substantial structural changes.[528]

With the election of John Paul II in 1978, Liberation Theology's increasing was severely hindered. Although not officially condemning Liberation Theology, "his Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (head of the institution previously known as the Holy Inquisition) Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger—later Pope Benedict XVI—was tasked with minimizing its influence. The Vatican's opposition to and distaste for the social activism inherent within Liberation Theology after 1980 furthered the criticism and harassment of its followers and widened "the chasm between progressives and conservatives."[529]

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[527] José Marins, "Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America," *International Review of Missions,* Vol. 68, (July, 1979) 238; Chomsky, 114.

[528] Those who opposed Liberation Theology varied from "vertical command-and-control forms of authority, to a defense of the prevailing socioeconomic and political orders, to rejection of the infiltration of Marxism and "this world" revolutionary ideas in the Church." Francisco E. Gonzalez, "Latin America: Intense Religiosity and Absence of Anti-System Confessional Parties," *SAIS Review of International Affairs,* Vol. 37, no. 15 (2017), 105-121. Chomsky, 58, 86. Liberation Theology was extremely controversial in the Vatican given its Marxist overtones and the belief that it condoned violence. "Examining Catholicism' Controversial Liberation Theology," NPR, November 25, 2015, http://www.npr.org/2015/05/25/409421365/examining-catholicism-controversial-liberation-theology.

[529] Gonzalez, 116.

Because landed elites, foreign investors, domestic businesses, local governments, in Central America, and other western countries benefitted from a subjugated workforce, the activism of Catholics in anti-poverty and pro-democracy campaigns was especially threatening. Despite the controversial nature of the liberalizing documents of Medellín and Liberation Theology, both had had a significant impact on the Catholic Church in Latin America. They had redirected a substantial number of clergy away from its longtime focus on the wealthy ruling classes, towards a "preferential option for the poor."[530] The conference in Medellín was followed by the 1979 Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla, Mexico, which reaffirmed Medellín's commitment to the poor.[531]

Perhaps the most well-known Latin American Catholic who was radically transformed by the Catholic social activism of the 1970s, especially its doctrine of "preferential option for the poor," was Salvadoran Óscar Romero.[532] He was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, in February 1977, mainly because of his conservative stance and unwillingness to oppose El Salvador's government and its ruling classes and the violence towards activists and the poor. El Salvador's government, military, and the wealthy celebrated Romero's appointment. They were

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[530] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988), xv-xviii. See also Skidmore, *A History of Latin America,* 203.

[531] By the time of the Puebla Conference in 1979, the liberalizing force of the Medellín Conference had been tampered, especially after the installation of Pope John Paul II. Gutiérrez, xx.

[532] A running debate regarding Archbishop Romero's stand towards Liberation Theology has been renewed with Pope Francis's left-leaning social justice pronouncements. While it is obvious Romero wanted to transcend Liberation Theology and Orthodox Catholicism, demanding both sides in El Salvador's bloody civil war put an end to the violence, others see him, perhaps more retrospectively, as an embodiment of Liberation Theology while others do not see him in that vein. For various points of the debate, see "Examining Catholicism's Controversial Liberation Theology," NPR, May 25, 2015. http://www.npr.org/2015/05/25/409421365/examining-catholicism-controversial-liberation-theology; Edgardo Colón-Emeric, *Óscar Romero's Theological Vision: Liberation and the Transfiguration of the Poor,* (Notre Dame, Ill: University of Notre Dame Press: 2018); Filip Mazurczak, "Archbishop Romero and Liberation Theology," *National Catholic Register,* May 7, 2015, https://www.ncregister.com/news/archbishop-romero-and-liberation-theology-acs6n5kf; "Archbishop Romero Had No Interest In Liberation Theology Says Secretary," *Catholic News Agency,* February 21, 2015, https://www.catholicnewsagency/com/news/31552/archbishop-romero-had-no-interest-in-liberation-theology-says-secretary; Pilar Hogan Closkey and Jon P. Hogan, *Romero's Legacy: The Call to Peace and Justice,* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Bradford T. Sull, *Religious Dialects of Pain and Imagination,* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

confident he would maintain the Church's status quo of non-intervention in the country's volatile politics. Romero was, however, profoundly transformed by the assassination of his close friend and fellow clergyman, Rutillio Grande, in March 1977, less than two months after he had been installed as Archbishop. For three years after Grande's murder, Romero used San Salvador's diocesan radio station to speak out against the murder and torture of Salvadorans, and the violence of leftist guerillas and pressed for social justice and radical reform in the government. In 1980, Romero was assassinated while saying Mass in the small chapel of the Hospital de la Divina Providencia. He had been seen as "the greatest threat to the greed and arrogance of the oligarchy of 14 families that ruled El Salvador as if it were their own fiefdom."[533] No one to this day has been charged with his murder, but it is primarily believed that the gunmen were members of a military death squad.[534]

While many United States Catholic orders incorporated Liberation Theology in some form into their social justice philosophies, including the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, the movement in Latin America was much more radical than in the United States.[535] This, in turn, drew progressive American Catholic Religious who embraced Liberation Theology to Latin America, especially Maryknoll Sisters and priests.[536] Maryknolls' social justice activism, in turn, inspired other Catholic orders in the United States and elsewhere to embrace Liberation Theology, increasing the overall number of foreign missionaries in Latin America.[537]

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[533] Notre Dame's Kellog Institute for International Studies, https://kellogg.nd.edu/archbishop-oscar-romero.
[534] James R. Brockman, *The Violence of Love: Oscar Romero* (Maryknoll: New York: Orbis Books, 2005), xv; Notre Dame's Kellog Institute for International Studies, https://kellogg.nd.edu/archbishop-oscar-romero.
[535] Anne Winkler-Morey, Ph.D. email with author, October 9, 2021.
[536] Established in 1912, Maryknoll Sisters were the first order of Women Religious founded in the United States for overseas missions. Sisters serve as nurses, doctors' social workers, theologians, teachers and environmentalists. After the Second Vatican Council, Maryknoll Sisters made the "option for the poor," a central feature of their social justice philosophy. They continue to address injustices in Africa, Asia, Latin America and other countries to this day. "Maryknoll Sisters," https://www.maryknollsisters.org/about-us/history/.
[537] Chomsky, 57-58, 88, 172.

When the first American Maryknoll missionaries arrived in Guatemala and Peru in 1943, as Susan Fitzpatrick-Behrens noted, they were "American nationalists, anti-communists, and doctrinaire Catholics hoping to establish modern orthodox Roman Catholicism in indigenous communities and provide material assistance" to the poor.[538] After the Second Vatican Council, however, they "became vocal critics of American foreign policy, advocates of radical social change, and promoters of intercultural Catholicism."[539] They strongly promoted Liberation Theology and came to believe that their role was to change "society to create a more just world radically."[540] Being more radical in Guatemala than in other Latin American countries, Maryknoll priests and Sisters promoted leadership skills among indigenous people by training catechists and organizing study groups to use "biblical texts to analyze and raise consciousness about local realities."[541] They also established hospitals, clinics, "barefoot doctors' training programs," and local radio stations "that created popular education projects through 'radio schools.''[542] Their convent in Guatemala City tutored American priests and Sisters from different orders, including the Grand Rapids Dominicans, before they were sent to their final mission bases. Some Maryknoll missionaries were expelled from Guatemala for their radical activism. In December 1967, four Maryknoll Sisters and priests had met with the armed wing of the Communist Party, the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR). Fearful the foursome would incentivize Guatemalans to join with the

[538] Susan Fitzpatrick-Behrens, "Confronting Colonialism: Maryknoll Catholic Missionaries in Peru and Guatemala, 1943-1968," Working Paper #338, May 27, 2007, 2.
https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/klg/0002332/f_0002332_1387.pdf
[539] Ibid, 2.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Chomsky, 83.
[542] The use of radio stations to speak to poor communities and to raise social justice consciences was prevalent in Latin America, given the difficulties in reaching certain regions. The people who worked and volunteered in these radio stations were often targets of authoritarian and military governments' crackdown on revolutionary and communist movements. It was not uncommon to hear of radio station workers going missing or seeing their bodies on the sides of roads. Ibid.

FAR, they were expelled from the country.[543] Actions such as Catholic Sisters and priests meeting with guerilla forces simply confirmed to authoritarian regimes the anti-government positions of progressive Catholic Religious and that they were a threat to the country.

Latin American military governments and authoritarian regimes saw "progressive Catholic activism," specifically activism by those who professed Liberation Theology, "as a threat in the same vein as an armed resistance movement."[544] The radicalization among some members of the Catholic Church, the right-wing leaders believed encouraged the poor and indigenous to challenge state authority and demand changes, especially in the area of land redistribution among Maya communities. The perceived radicalization of Catholic Religious, however, also increased the widespread violence throughout the countryside as dictatorships sought to suppress the Liberation Theology movement and its activists. priests, Women Religious, Catechists, and sometimes entire villages were caught up in the violence. They were murdered by brutal military and paramilitary forces that sought to maintain their authority over the poor and against leftist guerilla forces trying to overthrow repressive governments. Overshadowing these developments and aiding regimes was the ever-looming presence of the United States, which had been, since the 19th century, been a dominant and interventionist presence in Latin American politics and economies.[545]

Political Coups and Natural Disasters: Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters Serving in Chimbote, Peru

In 1958, Pope Pius XII established the Pontifical Commission on Latin America to address the needs of the Catholic Church in Latin America and to stem the tide of communism which the

[543] Fitzpatrick-Behrens. 2
[544] Bryan Manewal and David Stark, "Religion in the Trenches: Liberation Theology and Evangelical Protestantism as Tools of Social Control in the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), *McNair Scholars Journal*, Vol. II, 2007, 49.
[545] For a history of the United States' intervention in Latin America, see Aviva Chomsky, *Central America's Forgotten History: Revolution, Violence, and the Roots of Migration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2021).

Vatican believed threatened to draw poor Catholics into its orbit.[546] The Commission then called on Catholic orders in the United States and elsewhere to send missionaries to serve the poor in Latin America. In 1963, Marywood's Mother Superior, Victor Flannery, chose the city of Chimbote, Peru. A town of "700,000 souls," located approximately two hundred and fifty miles north of the capital of Lima, Mother Victor chose the city because of the "extreme poverty of the people," and the "presence of Dominican priests" already there.[547]

Marywood Sisters Marie Dominica Viesnoraitis and Herman Marie Maez were the first Marywood Sisters who volunteered to go to Latin America.[548] Sister Marie Vienoraitis was born on December 2, 1912, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Mathias and Petronilla Viesnoraitis who had immigrated from Lithuania. Educated by the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at S.S. Peter and Paul School in Grand Rapids, she had wanted to enter Marywood at the age of thirteen, being drawn to what she saw as the "happiness, peace, and contentment," the Sisters seemed to radiate.[549] Being too young to enter the order, she had to wait until she was fifteen, the youngest age Marywood would allow. Prior to going to Peru she taught elementary age students throughout the state of Michigan. She eventually spent nineteen years in Peru working with the poor, supervising primary school teachers, helping with Religious Formation of teachers, preparing students for First Holy Communion and "formation of local community living through prayer, sharing, and

[546] Navarre, 211. The Vatican was also deeply troubled and threatened by the political activism of the communist party in Italy, which also played a part in motivating the establishment of the commission. See Elisa A. Carrillo, "The Italian Catholic Church and Communism, 1943-1963," *The Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 77, no. 4 (October 1991). For more on the communist movement in Latin America, see José Aricó and David Broder, *Marx and Latin America* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Publishers, 2014); Harry E. Vanden and Marc Becker, *José Carlos Maritátegui,* New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011. Maritátegui was one of Peru's most important intellectual activists in the 20th Century. His written works are still widely popular in Latin America.
[547] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time,* 211.
[548] Navarre, 211. The Sisters had, since 1925, also served in New Mexico in schools and in hospitals. Navarre, 196.
[549] "Maria Viesnoratitis, O.P., " Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood, https://grdominicans.org/sisters/sister-marie-dominica-viesnoraitis/?back=deceased.

togetherness."[550] This work "meant treks on foot and in Chimbote's colectivos (taxicabs) over the ever-dusty roads."[551] After her return to Grand Rapids in 1981, she continued ministering for Chimbote by availing "herself of every possible opportunity to make known the tremendous work being done in Chimbote."[552] Thus, she was able to procure much-needed help to continue the missionary work," of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters in Chimbote.[553]

Sister Maria Maez was born on September 16, 1921 in Saguache, Colorado to Herman and Fidelia Maez. One of five siblings, Sister Maez entered Marywood on September 8, 1941. Before going to Peru, she taught in Michigan, Canada and New Mexico. She spent seven years in Chimbote before returning to Grand Rapids in1970.[554]

When Sisters Viesnoraitis and Maez went to Peru they joined an already established small mission base, the Center for Social Works, run by several priests from the Diocese of Pittsburgh.[555] Initially, the Center focused on Catechetical studies for locals. After the Second Vatican Council, they expanded their mission to include multi-service health services, eventually having a modern medical laboratory, a large educational facility, the *Asilo* (home for the aged), and an orphanage for children ages five and under.[556]

In 1963, two years before the Second Vatican Council called Women Religious to move beyond their convents and schoolrooms, Sisters Viesnoratis and Maez attended the Second National Congress of Women Religious in Peru, where they were challenged to care for Peru's poorest children. Sister Maez wrote to the Motherhouse in Grand Rapids that in Lima alone,

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[550] Ibid.
[551] Ibid.
[552] Ibid.
[553] Ibid. Sister Viesnoraitis passed away on July 3, 2006.
[554] "Sister Maria Maez (Celsa), 1921-2017," *Taos News,* May 17, 2017, https://taosnews.com/obituaries/sister-maria-maez-celsa-1921-2017/article_f16a8725-79a50fe-980-40fe6938c7d1.html.
[555] Diocese of Pittsburgh, "Our Diocesan Mission: Chimbote, Peru," 2015, https://chimbotefoundation.org/resources/.
[556] Ibid.

hundreds of Sisters were "educating only eight percent of all the children," and they were challenged to get out of the "private schools and attend the poor as well as the rich."[557]

That same year saw the addition of two more Marywood Sisters, Sisters Teresita Garcia and Georgiana Kowalski, to the Chimbote mission.[558] Sister Teresita, the second of twelve children, was born to Gregorio and Maurcia Garcia in New Mexico. She entered Marywood in 1950 and spent eleven years teaching in schools throughout Michigan before making her way to Peru in 1963. While in Peru she "supervised religious classes and helped found and direct a school of religious studies for teachers."[559] Her experience in Chimbote, she wrote, "opened the windows of my soul and my heart as Vatican II opened the windows of the church."[560] She returned to the United States in 1989 where she continued her ministries in religious education.

After the Second Vatican Council, more Marywood Sisters joined the team in Peru, including a nurse and a Sister certified in midwifery, reflecting the Sisters attentiveness to the Second Vatican Council's call to address not only the faith of the people to whom they served but their physical and emotional needs as well. The Sisters were well equipped to handle the extremely high infant mortality rate and paucity of pre-and post-maternal care in Chimbote with the establishment of the Maternidad Maternity Hospital, helping to increase maternal and infant mortality rate exponentially.[561]

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[557] Navarre, 212.
[558] Ibid. I was unable to procure biographical information of Sister Kowalski.
[559] "Sister Terisita Garcia,O.P." Grand Rapids Dominicans, https://www.grdominicans.org/sisters/sister-teresita-garcia/.
[560] Ibid.
[561] Ibid, 219.

Fig. 4.1. Sister Teresita Garcia.[562]

In 1968, the Peruvian Army, led by General Juan Velasco Alvarado, overthrew the government of Fernando Belaunde Terry, whose administration had become bogged down in controversies regarding the licensure of Peru's oil fields and its quarrels with Peru's Congress.[563] Alvardo's government soon devolved into an authoritarian regime making it more dangerous and challenging for the Sisters in Chimbote to address the extreme needs of the poor.[564] While Alvarado's administration instituted a series of radical reforms and was considered to be one of "Latin America's most ambitious military governments," it soon devolved into an authoritarian regime making it more dangerous and challenging for the Sisters in Chimbote to address the

[562] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[563]For scholarship on the 1968 coup see Carlos Aguirre, *The Peculiar Revolution: Rethinking the Peruvian Experiment Under Military* Rule (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2017); Abraham F. Lowenthal, "Peru's Ambiguous Revolution," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 52, No. 4, (July 1974), pp. 799-817.
[564] Thomas Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205.

extreme needs of the poor.[565] By the mid-1970s, newspapers, television, and radio stations had been nationalized and controlled pro-government staff. Opponents of the regime were "harassed, intimidated, exiled, and jailed, and it was particularly dangerous for foreigners."[566] The Dominican Sisters in Chimbote experienced the same challenges and threats as the Peruvians living under the military dictatorship: military curfews, food precarity, and dangerous traveling conditions. They were, however, determined to continue their ministries in Chimbote and refused to leave, despite the increased dangers the new regime presented.[567]

While living under the military dictatorship caused extreme hardships for the Sisters, the deadly 1970 Ancash earthquake and the subsequent landslides made living in Chimbote nearly impossible.[568] The 7.9/8.0 earthquake, located undersea twenty-two miles west of Chimbote, struck at 3:330 p.m. on Sunday, May 31st. Precise death-toll numbers are lacking, but it is estimated that over 70,000 people lost their lives, with 3,000 deaths in Chimbote alone.[569] Over two-thirds of the deaths were caused "by the collapse of structures—mainly adobe dwellings constructed of sun-dried clay and straw materials."[570] Over seventy-five percent of the city was destroyed by the avalanche of "rock, ice, and snow," which "roared down the mountain at speeds upwards of 150 miles an hour."[571] Two Sisters, Sisters of Saint Joseph, Gabriel Joseph Gussin and

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[565] Thomas Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 205.
[566] Ibid, 208. Alvarado was removed from the presidency in 1975 due to ill health and his dwindling grasp on power. He was replaced by the Joint Chiefs with another general, Francisco Morales. Skidmore, 209.
[567] Navare, *Tapestry in Time,* 220.
[568] "Disaster in Peru," *New York Times,* June 3, 1970; H.J. Maidenberg, "Area Devastated by Quake: Peru Appeals for Help," *New York Times*, June 3, 1970.
[569]"Earthquake Rocks Half of Peru: Nearly 200 Are Reported Killed," *New York Times,* June 1, 1970; H.J. Maidenberg, "Peru Estimates 30,000 Died In Quake That Wiped Out Scores of Towns in North," *New York Times,* June 2, 1970; H. J. Maidenberg, "We May Never Know How Many Died in Peru Quake," *New York Times,* June 7, 1970.
[570] In wealthier regions with better building construction, the death toll was not as severe as in poorer areas. Consortium of geomagnetic correspondents, "Earthquakes: Death Toll in Peru," *Nature,* Vol. 227, (London, July 18, 1970): 224.
[571] Ibid. Malcolm W. Browne, "Peru's Rubble Cleared, but Rebuilding is Another Story," *New York Times,* December 8, 1970.

Franciscan Sister Edith Mary Selik, who worked alongside Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters, were tragically crushed to death in the quake. Sister John Cassian Logue was seriously injured, and required a lengthy recuperation before returning to work.[572] Multiple buildings were destroyed, including the *Asilo*, the maternity hospital, and water and sewage lines. The Sisters' convent, the outpatient clinic, and several other buildings in the compound were severely damaged. Most Peruvians who had worked alongside the Sisters, or were helped by their work, assumed they would return to the United States immediately. The Sisters, however, refused to leave as "babies were on their way to be born," and the wounded and displaced needed tending.[573]

After a decade's worth of back-breaking work to restore the Chimbote mission after the earthquake, another natural disaster struck. In late 1982, a devastating weather pattern developed, an El Niño, which warmed the waters of the Pacific Ocean and caused heavy rains and flooding in some regions in Peru and drought in the other areas. The El Niño severely impacted agricultural output and worsened the health and welfare of the poor. [574] By the mid-1980s, the gap between the destitute in the highlands and those living in the wealthier coastal regions had increased exponentially, leading to worsening poverty and injustice which the Sisters continued to address.

The deteriorating situation in Peru provided fertile ground for a revolutionary movement, the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path).[575] The Shining Path movement advocated the violent overthrow of the government by "combining ideological indoctrination with physical violence."[576]

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[572] Ibid, 221.
[573] Ibid.
[574] Skidmore, 210; Navarre, 224.
[575] For more on the Shining Path, see Gustavo Gorriti Ellenbogen, *The Shining Path: A History of the Millenarian War in Peru* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); David Scott Palmer, *The Shining Path of Peru* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Simon Strong, *Shing Path: Terror and Revolution in Peru,* (New York: Times Books, 1992); For a cultural interpretation of the impact of the Shining Path, see: Anne Lambright, *Andean Truths: Transitional Justice, Ethnicity and Cultural Production in Post-Shining Path Peru* (Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 2015); Cynthia Milton, *Art From a Fractured Past: Memory and Truth-Telling in a Post Shining Path Peru,* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2014).
[576] Skidmore, 210-11.

The campaign entered the Peruvian psyche by brutally murdering village leaders who resisted their violent insurgency.[577] The military responded with a bloody offense that "left its own wake of repression," which did little but enhance Shining Path's influence throughout the country.[578] Dominican Sister Lillian Bockheim, who had been in Peru since the 1960s, reported that she found herself often terrified and "choked with fear" during the time of terror. Only "having her faith" gave her the strength to remain in the country.[579]

The end of the twentieth century did not provide relief for those suffering from the economic and social disasters that beset Peru. Neither did the 1990 election of the agrarian economist Alberto Fujimori, who styled himself "a man of the people" and vowed to end the violence, better the economy, and improve the plight of the poor.[580] Fujimori initially promised to be a godsend for the violent and poverty-stricken nation. His administration soon deteriorated, however, into yet another violent dictatorship. By 2000, Fujimori had gained control over the legislative and judicial branches and changed the constitution, paving the way for a third run at the presidency. Throughout Fujimori's tenure, his administration initiated a "radical restructuring program—slashing tariffs, welcoming foreign investment, (and) weakening the role of labor."[581] As resistance to Fujimori and his programs grew, grassroots groups, students, unions, and human rights activists, joined opposition leaders throughout the country to spearhead massive

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[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid.
[579] Navarre, 224.
[580] Ibid, 213. Works detailing Alberto Fujimori, his authoritarian regime, and his fall include Tim Anderson, *Alberto Fujimori* (Ipswich, MA: Great Neck Publishing, 2006); Julio Carrión, ed. *The Fujimori Legacy: The Rise of Electoral Authoritarianism in Peru* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); John M. Carey, "Transparency Versus Collective Action: Fujimori's Legacy and the Peruvian Congress," *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 36, no. 9 (November 2003), 983-1006; Alberto Watanabe and Aaron Watanabe, "Peru Since Fujimori," *Journal of Democracy,* Vol. 27, No. 3 (2016), 148-157; Sebastiån Calderón Bentin, "The Politics of Illusion: The Collapse of the Fujimori Regime in Peru," *Theatre Survey*, Vol. 59, no. 1, (Jan 2018): 84-107; Patricio Noboa, "Former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori's Extradition Process," *Law and Business Review of the Americas,* Vol. 14, no. 3, (Summer 2008): 621-630; Ernesto Garcia Calderon, "Peru's Decade of Living Dangerously," *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2001): 46-58.
[581] Skidmore, 213.

demonstrations. Opponents accused Fujimori of "repression, corruption, drug trafficking and electoral fraud."[582] By the time of his 2000 campaign, there were reports of "torture and extrajudicial killings."[583] He was convicted in 2009 for "commanding death squads that massacred civilians in a counterinsurgency campaign" and corruption and currently remains in prison.[584]

Political instability and violence continued in the early decades of the twenty-first century. On November 15, 2020, interim President, Manuel Merino, was forced to step down, only six days after being sworn in. Earlier demonstrations protesting the forced removal of President Martin Vizcarra and the appointment of Merino resulted in the largest protests in Peru "since the downfall of then-President Albert Fujimori in 2000."[585] The demonstrations resulted in the deaths of two protestors at the hands of the police, sparking Merino's removal. Within one week, Peru saw the removal or installation of three presidents.[586]

Most recently, Marywood Sisters serving in Peru have struggled with the ravages of the Covid-19 Pandemic. Sister Margaret Birchmeier, who has served in Chimbote since 1965, reported that when the pandemic first struck, they were ordered to close all services at the medical center except for labor and delivery and the medical lab. All other programs, including pre-and-postnatal care, infant and child check-ups, and all educational programs, were shuttered. This significantly impacted the poorest residents of Peru as private cars were not allowed on the roads, and public transportation was severely reduced, making it nearly impossible for patients to access the clinic

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[582]Sebastián Calderón Bentin, "The Politics of Illusion: The Collapse of the Fujimori Regime in Peru," *Theatre Survey,* Vol. 59, No. 1, (January 2019), 84.
[583] Bentin, 84.
[584] Mita Taj and Marco Aquino, "Fujimori, Pardon Annulled, Forced Back to Prison," *Reuters,* January 23, 209.
[585] Bentin, 84.
[586] Carlos Bejar-Garcia, "Populism and Peru: How a Dangerous Ideology Caused the Country's Recent Instability," *Harvard International Review,* Vol. 42, no. 2 (Spring 2021), 1-5. "Peru's Merino Stokes Anger, Fear in a Traumatized Country," *The New York Times,* November 16, 2020; "Peru's Interim President Manuel Merino Resigns Amid Protests," *The New York Times,* November 16, 2020; "Peru Chooses 3rd President in a Week Amid Street Protests," *The New York Times,* November 17, 2020.

or for the Sisters to move around the city.[587] As of August 2021, many residents have received Covid-19 vaccines, reducing the number of Covid-positive cases in Chimbote but resources, including basic necessities, are still lacking, and restrictions remain in place. The Center's pre-and postnatal clinics remain closed, and the infant and child development program has been shuttered. In her blog posted August 30, 2021, Birchmeier noted that "as usual, the poor in Chimbote are affected the most . . .the poor have very challenging lives under normal circumstances, and this pandemic has made everything much harder."[588]

Despite the dangers and difficulties Marywood Sisters faced while living under dictatorships and addressing the social inequities in Peru, they have seen positive improvements to the lives of women and Children in Chimbote. By 2013, the average age of first-time mothers increased from girls of thirteen and fourteen years old to women in their twenties. Infant and maternal mortality rates have decreased significantly, with more than 100,000 reported births at the *Maternidad* since it opened in the mid-1960s. The Sisters cite the ongoing education programs for young mothers, such as Lamaze classes, the establishment of a prenatal clinic and a Well Baby Clinic, and the "114 laypersons serving" in maternity, neonatal, orphan care, outpatient clinic general medicine, and laboratory, as the source of the improvement in the lives of the Chimbote residents they serve.[589] These gains have been made despite circumstances of political, economic, and social instability.

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[587] Sister Margaret Mary Birchmeir, OP. "Regarding the Current COVID-19 Situation," August 30, 2021. https://chimbotefoundation.org/8-21-covid-update/.
[588] Sister Margaret Mary Birchmeir, OP. "Regarding the Current COVID-19 Situation," August 30, 2021. https://chimbotefoundation.org/8-21-covid-update/.
[589] Ibid.

Serving in San Pedro Sula, Honduras: HIV-AIDS, Hurricane Mitch, and a Political Coup

San Pedro Sula, Honduras, was the site of a collaborative mission established between Marywood Sisters, Dominican Sisters from Columbus, Ohio, and Dominican Friars already established in Honduras. After six years of planning, discernment, and multiple visits to Honduras, the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood sent Sister Joan Williams to San Pedro, Honduras in 1998 to serve HIV-AIDS patients and incarcerated persons in the local prison.[590] The Sisters and Friars also offered "preaching workshops," taught at the Catholic University of Honduras, and they operated a radio program in San Pedro Sula. Sister Williams entered Honduras knowing it was a dangerous place to minister, with political upheavals, violence, natural disasters, extreme poverty, and an HIV-AIDS epidemic.[591] One of the poorest countries in Central America with the least fertile land, it was also dominated by American companies and the U.S. military over the twentieth century.[592]

While civil wars wracked Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala in the 1980s, Honduras remained free of military conflict. Still, it became an essential player in the region as the United States used it as a staging ground for its involvement in other countries. Particularly important to the United States was to crush leftist forces in El Salvador and support Nicaragua's Contras against the Sandinistas. US troops trained both Salvadoran and Contra forces in Honduras, with Honduras

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[590] Other missions activity included a preaching ministry in collaboration with the diocesan pastoral team, and two-year formation program in theology for laity, housing families left homeless after Hurricane Mitch and a pre-school. The HIV-AIDS program offered weekly support for adults and teens; workshops for families regarding physical, psychological, and social aspects of HIV-AIDS. Central America File, Honduras folder, Archives of the Dominican Sisters at Marywood, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

[591] In 1974, Hurricane Fifi, the third deadliest Atlantic hurricane, destroyed approximately sixty percent of Honduran agricultural output and dropped 24 inches of rain in 36 hours in the northern regions of the country. http://www.hurricanescience.org/history/storms/1970s/fifi/; Chomsky, 149.

[592] By 1950, the United Fruit country was the largest landholder in Honduras, with most of the country's wealth landing in New York, Boston, and New Orleans. It was *the* banana country with its national politics "subordinated to the machinations of the companies" and where banana companies "decided the outcome of Honduran political battles." Chomsky, 39, 146. See also, William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America,* (Chapel Hill, NC.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America,* (New York: WW Norton, 1984).

eventually providing bases for four different armies by the mid-1980s: Honduran, Salvadoran, Contras, and U.S. forces.[593] So many U.S. troops had flooded Honduras by the mid-1980s that scholars dubbed it the "USS Honduras."[594] The country's military also was drawn into the United States incursions in Nicaragua and El Salvador. While domestic violence in Honduras paled in comparison to its neighbors, the government "stalked, kidnapped, tortured and murdered" Catholics and other suspected rebels.[595] The Honduran government, supported by the CIA, also created the notorious Military Intelligence Battalion 316, which killed "hundreds of Catholics and leftist activists in the 1980s," including James Guadalupe Carney, an American Jesuit priest from Chicago.[596]

In the last decades of the twentieth century, Honduras was hit hard by the HIV-AIDS epidemic. According to the *United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS*, Honduras "had an adult prevalence of 1.5 percent, making it the "hardest-hit country in Central America" apart from Belize.[597] San Pedro Sulu, where the Dominican Sisters were stationed, was considered the epicenter of HIV-AIDS in Honduras.[598] The high rate of the disease was due to its spread mainly

[593] Chomsky, 151; Skidmore, 340-341. See also, LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard;* LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions;* Peter Meyer, "Honduras: Background and U.S. Relations," *Current Politics and Economies of South and Central America,* Vol. 12, No. 2, (2019): 227-271' David Bonior, "Reagan and Central America," *SAIS Review,* Vol. 1, No. 2, (1981): 3; Richard Allen White, *The Morass: United States Intervention in Central America,* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984)*;* Jenny Pearce, *Under the Eagle: U.S. Intervention in Central America,* (Boston, MA.: South End Press, 1982.

[594] Juanita Darling, "Tales of 1980s Brutalities by Contras Arise in Honduras: Central America: Probe of Air Base Near Border with Nicaragua Puts Spotlight on U.S. Role in Region," *The Los Angeles Times,* October 27, 1999; Chomsky, 151; Skidmore, 340-341.

[595] Chomsky, 152.

[596] Julie Preston, "Honduras Accused of Death-Squad Operations: Exile Says Members of 'Battalion 316' Once Reportedly Disbanded, Continues to Kill," *The Washington Post,* November 1, 1988. For more on this topic see Ted Schmidt, "James Guadalupe Carney, S.J.: The Romero of Honduras," *The Catholic New Times* Vol. 28, No. 8 (May 9, 2004) 11-12; John Weeks, "An Interpretation of the Central American Crisis," *Latin American Research Review,* Vol. 21, No. 3, (1986): 31-53.

[597] Jon Cohen, "Honduras: Why So High? A Knotty Story," *Science*, Vol. 313, (July 2006): 481-483.

[598] Donna Maria Moses, O.P., *American Catholic Women Religious: Radicalized by Mission,* 204.

by heterosexuals, but its gay male population had "a prevalence of HIV-AIDS of 13%--even higher than that of female sex workers, at 9.7%."[599]

There are several theories as to why Honduras had the highest percentage rates in Central America. Epidemiologist Manuel Sierra postulates that a crucial distinguishing feature was the country's role in the Cold War. Arguing that during the 1980s, as U.S. military troops and Nicaraguan Contras flooded into Honduras as part of military actions in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, sex workers followed, igniting the spread of the virus, which eventually made its way throughout the entire country. Other factors contributing to high numbers included the prison population with spousal visitations, homosexual sex, and an inability to locate or afford condoms. Merchant seamen, who made their way to New York City, Asia, and Africa, then back to Honduras, also contributed to the spread of the disease.[600]

Cultural myths, the stigmatization of AIDS-HIV patients, and homophobia contributed to efforts to slow down the disease and treat infected patients in Honduras.[601] The Vatican's opposition to condoms in the predominantly Catholic Central American countries also hampered efforts to halt the spread.[602] Journalist Nick Kristof pointed to the contradictory actions of the Catholic Church in tackling the disease. He wrote that, "Nobody does nobler work throughout the developing world . . . You find priests and nuns in the most remote spots of Latin America and Africa, curing the sick and feeding the hungry." And yet, at the same time, "the Vatican's ban on

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[599] United States Agency for International Development, "USAID/Honduras: HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs Evaluation," January 2011, https://healtheducationresources.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/1.401_Honduras_HIV_Prevention_Evaluation_FINAL_Public_-_508_3.29.11.pdf. For more on HIV-AIDS in Honduras see Cohen, "Honduras: Why So High? A Knotty Story," 481.

[600] Cohen, 482. For other theories on why HIV-AIDS in Honduras reached skyrocketing proportions, see the United States Agency for International Development, "USAID/Honduras: HIV/AIDS Prevention Programs Evaluation," January 2011.

[601] Mary Jo McConahay, "Aids Activists Educates Salvadorans, a Village at a Time," *National Catholic Reporter,* Vol. 51, No. 17, (June 5-June 18, 2015), 3-4. Cohen, 482-483.

[602] Cohen, 483; Nicholas Kristof, "The Pope and AIDS," *The New York Times,* May 8, 2005.

condoms has cost many hundreds of thousands of lives from AIDS."[603] Noting that, "fortunately, the Vatican's policies are breached by those charged with carrying them out," Kristoff pointed to the Maryknoll Sisters in Guatemala who counseled sex workers to use condoms and Catholic doctors in El Salvador who routinely explained to patients how to use condoms.[604]

In Honduras, despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles to controlling the disease down, Catholic activists, including Sister Williams, joined with other activists and healthcare professionals "to become part of the solution with stepped up efforts to combat the disease."[605] The Casa Aurora HIV program in San Pedro Sula, supported, in part by the Grand Rapids Dominicans, had a comprehensive program to stem the epidemic and to treat infected adults and children. The center offered support groups for children, adults, and their families, physical and psychiatric care, a medical dispensary, home visits, and small business ventures to help families earn extra income.[606] Given that secular doctors and nurses also volunteered their services at the clinic it can be safely assumed that condom instruction and distribution was an element of the program.

Shortly after Sister Williams arrived in 1998, the deadly hurricane to hit Central America, Hurricane Mitch, hit Honduras, immediately shifting the HIV-AIDS and prison ministries to efforts to help hurricane survivors. Hitting the poorest regions of the country the most, Mitch killed at least eleven thousand people and displaced two million others. The devastation caused by the hurricane forced powerful fruit companies to look for other means of revenue after the country's profitable banana crops were destroyed. The shift exemplified "how a disaster could exacerbate

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[603] Nicholas Kristof, "The Pope and AIDS," *The New York Times,* May 8, 2005.
[604] Kristof, "The Pope and AIDS."
[605] Cohen, 482.
[606] Sr. Dolores Regan, O.P., "Dominican Mission in Honduras," November 2007. Central America Folder, Archives at the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.

inequities: the companies were able to take advantage of the opportunity to shift to African palm production, with the added advantage of being able to lay off many of their unionized workers."[607]

On June 28, 2009, the Honduran military, supported by the national Congress and the Supreme Court, overthrew the democratically elected President Manuel Zelaya. Robert Micheletti, president of the Congress, appointed himself president. The coup ignited a series of mass demonstrations, a military lockdown, and a "sharp rise in police beatings, mass arrests of demonstrators and intimidation of human rights defenders."[608] Amnesty International reported that the police raided poor neighborhoods in the capital, to look for government opponents in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, where the Sisters lived. Other outlets reported random police beatings of individuals on the streets and "the closure of media outlets, the confiscation of equipment and physical abuse of journalists and camerapersons."[609] The aftermath of the coup was perilous for women. Gilda Rivera, director of the Centro para-Derechos las Mujeres (Center for Women's Rights), noted that "for Honduran women, it has always been worrying, but since the coup d'état," things deteriorated with an increase in documented cases of sexual assault of women by government security forces.[610]

Activists argued that the fundamental problem underlying the government's repressive tactics after the coup were the hundreds of murders and disappearances in the 1980s that had never

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[607] Chomsky, 158. For more information on unions in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, see "In Debt to Disaster: What Happened to Honduras After Hurricane Mitch," Reliefweb, October 31, 1999; https://reliefweb.int/report/honduras/debt-disaster-what-happened-honduras-after-hurricane-mitch

[608] "Beatings and Detentions Follow Honduras Demonstrators," Amnesty International, September 24, 2009. https://amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2009/09/beatings-and-detentions-follow-honduras-demonstrations-20090924/; "Honduras Coup Blasted," *The Chicago Tribune,* June 30, 2009; Tracy Wilkinson, "Divisions Run Deep in Honduras over Coup," *The Los Angeles Times,* July 4, 2009.

[609] "Beatings and Detentions Follow Honduras Demonstrators," Amnesty International, September 24, 2009. https://amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2009/09/beatings-and-detentions-follow-honduras-demonstrations-20090924/

[610] "Activists in Honduras tell Amnesty International of hidden human rights crisis" Amnesty International, December 4, 2009. https://amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2009/12/activists-honduras-tell-amnesty-international-hidden-rights-crisis-2009120/. See also, Cecelia Menjìvar and Shannon Drysdale Walsh, "The Architecture of Feminicide: The State, Inequities, and Everyday Gender Violence in Honduras," *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (2017): 221-240.

been addressed. Authorities seemed to have garnered from the lack of arrests that "when repression goes unpunished, it happens again."[611] Residents of San Pedro Sula noted the extreme fear that paralyzed the city during the coup and the lockdown, "(d)uring the state of emergency you could feel a climate of fear, collective panic. Nothing could move here if it hadn't been authorized by the armed forces, particularly the army. When the state of emergency was declared that day, everybody just ran home to hide and find refuge. What the authorities would do that night was nobody's responsibility."[612] Violence directed at journalists and political dissidents increased, and the military occupied media outlets censuring the news coverage after the coup.[613]

Serving in Guatemala: Earthquakes, Civil War, Assassinations, and Kidnappings

By contrast with the late development of military government in Honduras, Guatemala's thirty-six year civil war, from 1960 to 1996, was one of the deadliest Cold War conflicts that affected Central America in the last half of the twentieth century. The war began in November 1960 after a group of army officers failed to overthrow the government of General Ydigoras Fuentes. The military engaged in battles with leftist guerilla forces but "increasingly the military targeted anyone seen as sympathetic to the rebels, including priests and nuns and entire indigenous villages."[614] Paramilitary forces joined the army in fighting leftist guerillas "without interference from the government or justice system."[615] Declassified documents revealed that the United States "consistently supported the military in spite of its awareness of human rights abuses."[616] By the time Sisters Jean Reimer and Helen LaValley were kidnapped in 1981, Guatemalans were

[611] Amnesty International, "Hidden Human Rights Crisis," December 4, 2009.
[612] Ibid.
[613] Ibid. See the following on the 2009 Honduran coup: Dana Frank, *The Long Honduran Night: Resistance, Terror, and the United States in the Aftermath of the Coup,* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2018); Victoria Cervantes, "Honduras Since the 2009 Coup," *Against the Current,* Vol. 32, no. 5, (Nov/Dec 2017): 9-10;
[614] Amy Bracken, "Why You Need to Know About Guatemala's Civil War," *The World,* December 29, 2016, https://theworld.org/stories/2016-12-29/why-you-need-know-about-guatemalas-civil-war.
[615] Amnesty International; Chomsky, 84.
[616] Amy Bracken, "Why You Need to Know About Guatemala's Civil War."

experiencing what the *Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions, and Recommendations* later classified as genocide, wholesale killings of indigenous people committed by military and paramilitary forces.[617] During the following year, over 18,000 people were killed, marking the year Sisters Reimer and La Valley were kidnapped as the deadliest years of the conflict.[618] The civil war resulted in the deaths of over 200,000 Guatemalans and the displacement of over one million people. Over ninety percent of human rights violations were committed by military or paramilitary forces, often aided, directly, or indirectly by the United States.[619] Not all victims of the civil war, however, were Guatemalan citizens. Foreigners, including American Catholic Religious, became targets of military and government violence.

Sister Jean Reimer was the first Marywood Sister to move to Guatemala. Born and raised in Saginaw, Michigan, she was considered a "delayed vocation" when she entered Marywood in 1952 at the age of twenty-three.[620] Before professing her vows, she worked as a nurse for three years but she had always been drawn to the idea of being a medical missionary. After entering Marywood, she spent three years in Brawley, California, working at a hospital Marywood Sisters staffed. Brawley was located thirty miles north of Mexicali, Mexico. After visiting the city, she requested permission from Marywood's leadership team to let her minister there rather than in California to pursue her desire to serve as a medical missionary. Reimer spent several years in Mexicali performing parish work, such as catechetical instruction with children and assisting in the mission's medical clinic. While serving in Mexicali, Reimer had a chance meeting with the

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[617] *Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions, and Recommendations.*
[618] Ibid.
[619] A smaller number of Guatemalans were killed by opposition forces. In 1994 the United Nations and the Guatemalan government signed an agreement to establish a commission to investigate human rights abuses during Guatemala's civil war. The commission's report was completed in 1999: Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions and Recommendations, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence."
[620] Before the Second Vatican Council, most entrants were young women, ages 16-19. At the age of 23, Reimer was considered an older entrant and therefore was given the label of "delayed vocation."

Fig. 4.2. Sister Jean Reimer, O.P., and students. Cir. 1970s.[621]

director of the Latin American Mission Program (LAMP), a missions program run by the diocese of San Francisco. The director encouraged her to go to Guatemala as the poverty and needs of the poor there were profound and greater even than in Mexicali.[622]

Moving to Guatemala in 1975, Sisters Reimer initially lived in the capital, Guatemala City. She started by honing her Spanish language skills with the Maryknolls at their base in Guatemala City. After studying in the capital for six weeks, Reimer moved to Chimaltenango, a small city thirty-five miles northwest of Guatemala City, where she stayed until 1976.[623] Here, she taught leadership skills and catechetical training to the local population based on a method that drew the Base Ecumenical Communities' model of small communities trained in leadership skills.

[621] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[622] "Great Women, Great Voices," Calvin College, DVD Interview, Sister Jean Reimer. March 12, 2008.
[623] Ibid.

Marywood Sister Jeannine Kalisz joined Reimer in Chimaltenango shortly thereafter. Born in 1929, Kalisz was the daughter of Polish immigrants. She had desired to be a missionary since her high school years. After making her profession at Marywood in 1941, she taught in Catholic schools throughout Michigan and New Mexico before being sent to Chimbote, Peru, in 1969. She made her way to Guatemala in April 1975.[624] Less than one year after she and Reimer arrived in Guatemala, the town of Chimaltenango and their home and parish were destroyed by a massive earthquake that killed over 3,000 people. Sisters Reimer and Kalisz escaped out the door of their bedroom "just as part of the wall came down on one of the beds."[625] In a letter to the Motherhouse, Sister Jean wrote about the suffering immediately after the earthquake that, "[p]eople were looking at one another, daze, unbelieving, fathers carrying their dead children . . . [m]y favorite bus helpter cried as he bent over the ground and bear hugged three small ones . . . Padre continued Mass amid sobs and the continued presentation of the dead as bodies were being excavated from the rubble and brought to the Plaza."[626] She noted further the difficulties she and Sister Jeannine faced, that "there is no habitable house in our pueblo of 11,000! The people are sleeping beneath nylon, metal, wood roofs, generally no sides, living out of doors. The days are quite hot, the nights quite cold . . . There has been no time for self-pity. At present the wounds have all been stitched . . . about 100 buried."[627] Sister Reimer, despite the tragedy, drew on her faith noting that "I have not been able to let myself feel too much about the past week, however, there has been an abiding, way down deep, calm in the faith of God's presence and countless examples of love for one another."[628]

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[624] https://www.grdominicans.org/sisters/sister-jeannine-kalisz/.
[625] "Guatemala Report: LAMP" February 27, 1976. Central America File, Guatemala Folder, Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[626] Letter from Sister Jean Reimer to Marywood leadership team, February 11, 1976. Central America File, Guatemala folder, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[627] Ibid.
[628] Ibid.

Sisters Reimer and Kalisz tended to the wounded and then with the rebuilding efforts with the help of funds procured by the Motherhouse. Marywood's leadership, however, insisted they return to the United States for a period of recovery.[629] Sister Reimer returned to Guatemala in 1977, while Sister Kalisz remained in the United States and then made her way to Papua New Guinea, and taught there for eight years.[630]

After returning to Guatemala, Reimer was assigned to the San Bernabe Parish in Acatenango in the Diocese of Solalá. Two Dominican Sisters, Ann Porter and Helen LaValley joined her in Acatenango in 1980. LaValley, born in 1910 in Green Bay, Wisconsin, entered Marywood in 1929. Her early social justice activism was shaped by Marywood Sisters Jane Marie Murray and Estelle Hackett and the Liturgical Movement of the early 1930s. LaValley began her teaching career in 1930 and graduated from Aquinas College, as one of the first graduates of the newly established four-year college, in 1942.[631] Later, she earned a Master of Science from Catholic University of America and an M.A. in Education from Stanford University. From 1969 to 1972, she served as the Prioress of Marywood, continuing to implement the changes brought on by the Second Vatican Council. She became more actively involved in social justice activism, demonstrating against the Vietnam War and supporting the United Farm Workers by joining picketers in Michigan during the 1970s.

Noting how, prior to the Second Vatican Council, she had "felt a call to distant missions---New Mexico, Guatemala, Peru," but, "[e]ach time 'obedience' dictated otherwise," preventing her from ministering abroad. After the Council, however, Marywood, like many other orders, "broadened its concept of mission. Once primarily a teaching community, we are no longer limited

[629] I was unable to determine the dates of Sisters Reimer and Kalisz's return to the United States.
[630] https://www.grdominicans.org/sisters/sister-jeannine-kalisz/.
[631] Prior to 1942, the college was a two-year degree granting institution.

to educating in the classroom," and that "at the same time there is greater freedom of choice for the individual sister to discern where the Lord is calling her."[632] Once in Guatemala, LaValley noted the greater agency afforded to her as "Guatemala offered the chance for pastoral work in an area where priests are scarce and the bishop is very supportive of sisters being in charge of parishes."[633]

While in Guatemala, she and Sister Reimer ministered to the people in their village, "visiting the sick and elderly, training catechists, teaching scripture, preparing liturgies and administering nutrition programs." She noted that they "tried to avoid getting into the political struggle. As the people came to us for refuge or for consolation, as brothers, husbands were missing or conscripted into the army, that became increasingly difficult."[634] Sister LaValley, however, did not shy away from the danger. Before going to Guatemala Sister Teresa Houlihan, the Prioress, asked Sister Jean Reimer if Helen "was ready to be buried there." She was. Recently found in the archives of Marywood is the small slip of paper in which she wrote, "In case of my death in Guatemala I wish to be buried there."[635]

In 1980 Reimer, LaValley, and Porter returned to Grand Rapids in 1980 to discuss the increasing violence, murders, and kidnappings in Guatemala. By the beginning of 1979, some Catholic orders were removing their missionaries from the country. In 1979, the entire diocese of El Quiché was closed because of the "unremitting repression and the killing of several priests."[636] In 1979, the Maryknolls, who had large centers throughout Guatemala, closed their centers in Huehuetenango, a city in the western highlands, after members' names started appearing on

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[632] Undated and untitled article, Central America File, Guatemala folder, Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[633] Ibid.
[634] Ibid.
[635] Central America Folder, Guatemala file, papers of Helen LaValley, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[636] Chomsky, 96.

military death lists. Nearly four hundred students who had participated in Maryknoll programs had been killed or disappeared in Huehuetenango alone.[637]

Marywood Prioress, Teresa Houlihan, did not want the Sisters to return to Guatemala, deeming it too dangerous. Still, the Sisters were determined to go back to "bring closure to our community." Houlihan agreed but required them to attend a six-week safety program with the Maryknolls in the United States and then "attach themselves to a Maryknoll team" in Guatemala when they returned to the country.[638] Ann Porter's brother, John, had visited his sister in Guatemala the previous year. After immersing himself in the Guatemalan newspapers while he was there, he had a good sense of the increasing dangers his sister Ann, and Sisters Reimer and LaValley faced if they remained in the country. On his return to the United States, he was thought to have visited Prioress Houlihan and "made it clear that she was responsible if anything happened to the Sisters."[639] Sister Ann Porter decided not to return to Guatemala for the sake of her brother and her elderly parents. Sister LaValley's family, too, was gravely concerned about her going back to Guatemala. Her younger brother, Ernest, reported that "the closest we ever came to having an argument was when she decided to go over there."[640] Sisters Reimer and La Valley returned to Guatemala in September 1981.

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[637] Ibid.
[638] Navarre, 271.
[639] Sister Jean Reimer, interview with author, October 7, 2021.
[640] "Thanksgiving to be Joyous for Nun's Family," UPI Archives, November 24, 1981 https://www.upi.comArchives/1981/11/24/Thanksgiving-to-be-joyous-for-nuns-family/27493754260000/.

Fig. 4.3. Sisters Helen LaValley, O.P., and Jean Reimer, O.P. Guatemala, cir. late 1970s.[641]

After their arrival, they began arranging to close their base and finalize their plans for their return to the United States. They recruited people to "take over our programs and development of women, on nutrition and health . . . and on Bible study and sacrament preparation."[642] Sister LaValley wrote to Prioress Hoolihan, "you will be happy to know that we have planned to fly out of Guatemala December 15, (1981). We decided that would be better than waiting until after Christmas."[643] Until their final departure, however, the pair continued working in Acatenango.

[641] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[642] Sister Helen LaValley to Teresa Hoolihan, Prioress, November 11, 1981. Central American File, Helen LaValley folder. Archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[643] Sister Helen LaValley letter to Teresa Hoolihan, Prioress, November 11, 1981.

They also attended a biannual ministerial conference hosted by the bishop of the diocese of Solalá, in Panajachel.

Panajachel, located approximately seventy miles west of Guatemala City, a little over 50 miles northeast of Acatenango, is situated on the north shore of Lake Atitlán. Given the increased violence in the country and the "persecution of the church," which had "been quite openly spoken of," Reimer and LaValley thought the conference had been canceled.[644] They were, therefore, "somewhat surprised" when an invitation from the bishop to the conference arrived at their convent. The bishop's letter "came with such a tone of insistency" and "urging us to come, almost a mandate."[645] The Papal Nuncio, Oriano Quilici, who had recently arrived in Guatemala, was going to be in attendance. After a second invitation arrived, "there seemed to be no question whether we would go or not."[646] Cancelling all but one event for the week of the conference, a wedding Padre Chepé was to officiate on Thursday afternoon, on the 19th of November, they agreed to drive together to Panajachel. On the morning of November 16th, Padre Chepé, and Felix Argueta, a young seminarian, picked up Reimer and LaValley in Padre Chepé's Toyota Land Runner and departed from Acatenango at 8:00 a.m. that morning. They were scheduled to arrive at the conference by 10:00 a.m. Knowing that people were being stopped at military checkpoints along the highway, they made sure they all had valid identification cards with them.[647]

It had been nearly six months since the group had traveled to Panajachel for the last pastoral conference. It was evident to all four travelers that there were fewer cars on the Pan-American

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[644] "Persecution of the church" refers to the kidnappings and murders of Catholics who agitated for social change and justice. Sister Jean Reimer, audio tape, 1981. Central America Folder, Jean Reimer Papers. Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives.

[645]Archbishop Oriano Quilici was appointed Nuncio to Guatemala in June 1981. http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bquilici.htmlSister Jean Reimer, audio tape, 1981. Central America Folder, Jean Reimer Papers. Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives.

[646] Ibid.

[647] Sister Jean Reimer, audio tape, 1981. Central America Folder, Jean Reimer Papers. Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives.

Highway, the main thoroughfare that runs from Mexico in the West to El Salvador in the southeast. They assumed this was because of increased violence in the area. There were car burnings and large trees being placed across the highway by guerilla forces or the military. The travelers had even looked for the burned car of their chancellor, Padre Eduardo Legary, "who en route to a pastoral activity had been taken out of his car" before military forces burned it.[648]

Making their way towards Panajachel, they noticed fewer people at roadside merchant stands and open-fire food markets for tourists. Also unsettling was military personnel walking through small towns, rather than the usual police officers.[649] Heading through Solalá, the small provincial capital, located approximately forty-five miles northwest of Guatemala City, they were taken aback at what they did not see: no significant military presence as just two weeks prior the city had been brutally attacked. Approximately two hundred guerrilla forces laid siege to the city for four hours, killing the governor of the province, Colonel Eduardo Rodas Amezquita, Solalá's national police chief, Maj. Julio Salvador Folgar, several police officers, and five civilians. The rebels had also firebombed cars and set fire to the military reserve headquarters, a municipal building, and state offices. They hijacked city buses escaping into the local hills before military reinforcements arrived.[650]

Passing through Solalá without incident, they arrived at the bishop's home in Panajachel around 9:30 in the morning. The conference proceeded unhindered. While pastoral topics, such as the establishment of a new marriage tribunal and catechesis material was discussed among the

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[648] Ibid.
[649] Ibid.
[650] "Guerrillas Kill Ten in Attack on Guatemala Town," UPI, October 30, 1981. https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/10/30/Guerrillas-kill-ten-in-attack-on-Guatemala-town/2240373266000/; "Leftist Guerrillas Firing Bazookas and Submachine Guns Briefly Seized," UPI, October 29, 1981. https://www.upi.com/Archives/1981/10/29/Leftist-guerrillas-firing-bazookas-and-submachine-guns-briefly-seized/5136373179600/; Sister Jean Reimer, audio tape, 1981. Central America Folder, Jean Reimer Papers. Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood Archives.

attendees, there also were discussions about the political situation, the recent kidnapping of the Minister of Health, Dr. Roquelino Recinos Mendez, and "the people who had been killed," but "this did not absorb us. We were aware of it."[651] As Sister Reimer noted in her interview with State Department after her kidnapping, the attendees were cognizant and deeply moved by the "the reality of the poor. The reality of injustice, of the repression that is going on by the government, by the military—the killing, the torture." [652]

The conference was to last until Thursday evening. Still, because of the wedding at which Padre Chepé was to officiate on Thursday afternoon, and other commitments the foursome had that day, they planned to leave early in the morning rather than in the evening. On their departure Thursday morning, they said their goodbyes to the bishop, who advised them to take the road along the coast because there had been car burnings and houses set on fire on the Pan-American Highway. There also had been bombings that week in Tecpán, west of Panajachel. They were unsure if the attacks were by leftist guerillas or by the military or both. Nevertheless, because the bishop advised them to take the coastal road, and the papal Nuncio had traveled that route on his way to the conference, they decided to take the coastal road.

Traveling on a "beautiful Guatemalan morning," the foursome remarked that they "felt like tourists because we just don't get out anymore."[653] and stopped at a small fruit stand and bought pineapple, papaya, and oranges, because of the difficulty in purchasing those items in Acatenango. They put the fruit in the back of the Toyota Land Runner. Turning on to a dirt road fourteen miles from the town of Santa Lucia, they "felt quite happy about the trip so far because we hadn't been stopped and hadn't even seen people (military) on the road doing any checking."[654] Stopping in

[651] Sister Jean Reimer, audio tape, 1981.
[652] Ibid.
[653] Ibid.
[654] Ibid.

Santa Lucia, they picked up a newspaper and noticed that the front-page headline was about Guatemala's government arming civilians to "better control the leftist's activity."[655]

After leaving Santa Lucia, they traveled about five miles when men in a small red pick-up truck motioned to them to slow down. A few hundred feet further, they were stopped by the military at a checkpoint and told to get out of their car. About eight soldiers, who "weren't terribly pleasant," but "not obnoxious to us either," asked for their identification cards and conducted a cursory check of their vehicle. After several other cars had been checked and allowed to proceed, Reimer became nervous and "kind of got the feeling that something more was going to happen."[656]

After their belongings and car keys were taken, the group was forced to walk up the bank of the road to an abandoned structure and were told to stay inside while armed soldiers surrounded them. After waiting for approximately an hour, six "big and kind of surly-looking" well-dressed men arrived on the site and put the group's luggage and other belongings into another vehicle. This made the group nervous as they knew if they were going to be released, their luggage would have remained in their own vehicle. Sister Reimer noticed that as the six men made their way towards the structure where they were being held, two of the men had green nylon ropes in their hands, and "oh, my golly, that really frightened me."[657] Realizing they were going to be kidnapped, Padre Chepé stood up "and gave us absolution" and said, "Remember, the hairs on your head are counted."[658] The men holding the group captive asked Padre Chepé if his name was "Mario," the Sisters responded, "No, Padre Velasquez," suggesting to the group that perhaps the military was looking for someone else and they had been taken by accident. Tying Padre Chepe and Felix's

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[655] Ibid.
[656] Ibid. The exact number of military soldiers at the checkpoint is unknown. Some newspapers reported that there were 25-35 soldiers. I have relied on Sister Jean Reimer's written and oral testimonies in which she noted that there were approximately eight soldiers. There may have been more soldiers at the checkpoint who did not engage with the group.
[657] Central American Files, Sister Jean Reimer folder, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[658] This is in reference to Luke 12:7 and Matthew 10:30.

hands behind their backs with the green nylon rope, blindfolding them, and taking them to another car, Reimer and LaValley were left sitting on the floor of the structure until the men returned. Blindfolding the two Sisters, but not tying their hands, they were told to get into the back of their Toyota Land Runner. They knew it was their vehicle "because it had our fruit in it." While Jean thought they would be left in the car, shot, and then the car set on fire, Helen whispered to Jean she thought they would kill them and drive the vehicle into a ravine, making it look like an accident.[659]

After being driven for approximately twenty-five minutes, they arrived at what they later believed to be a secret military base. Pulled out of the car roughly and taken into a building, the soldiers took all their jewelry and began "frisking" them. Jean recounted that one soldier attempted to assault her sexually, but she had pushed him away and gave him a plastic bag with money she had tucked into her bra. Appeased, the soldier told Jean and Helen to sit down, still blindfolded, before being led to a wet, urine-laden cement room, where they sat next to each other and prayed silently. Eventually, Sisters Reimer and LaValley were separated, put in small cement cells, and individually interrogated over the course of their captivity. According to Sister Reimer, Padre Chepé and Felix were put into separate cells in the same facility and interrogated. Sister Reimer reported that the young seminarian, Felix Argueta, was physically abused during his interrogations.[660]

For five days, the Sisters and priests were held captive at the military base and were interrogated daily. It is unknown what questions were asked of Padre Chepé, Felix, or Sister LaValley apart from Sister LaValley having demanded to see a lawyer during one interrogation

[659] Central American Files, Sister Jean Reimer folder, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[660] Ibid.

setting.[661] Sister Reimer, however, wrote notes of her captivity, albeit difficult to read, which allows us some insights into her captivity experience. Sister Reimer experienced another attempted sexual assault, where she was "knocked around," and tossed onto a mattress. Believing if she was raped "it would be more difficult to (for them) to free me so I fought," until another guard eventually stopped the assault.[662] Reimer noted the presence of two young women, possibly teenage girls, also being held in the same place as prisoners with whom she communicated from time to time.[663]

The interrogators questioned Sister Reimer's choice of clothing reflecting the suspicion of the military and government had towards Women Religious who embraced the Second Vatican Council's more modern conventions for religious dress. In fact, the first question she was asked was, "why are you not in a habit?"[664] Their captors also may have also seen Sisters wearing secular clothing as women who embraced radical Liberation Theology as the next question was regarding

[661] The story of Sister LaValley asking for an attorney has gone down in Marywood history, reflecting LaValley's tenacity in confronting armed military soldiers and perhaps underestimating the seriousness of the situation she was in. Jean Reimer interview with Author, October 7, 1962.
[662] Central American Files, Sister Jean Reimer folder, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[663] After Reimer, LaValley, Padre Chepé, and Felix were released, they read in newspaper accounts of two young women found dead on the side of the road. The young women had worked or volunteered at a radio station. The government and military often attacked radio station employees and volunteers because of the social justice activism promoted on radio station programs. Central American Files, Sister Jean Reimer folder, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[664] Ibid.

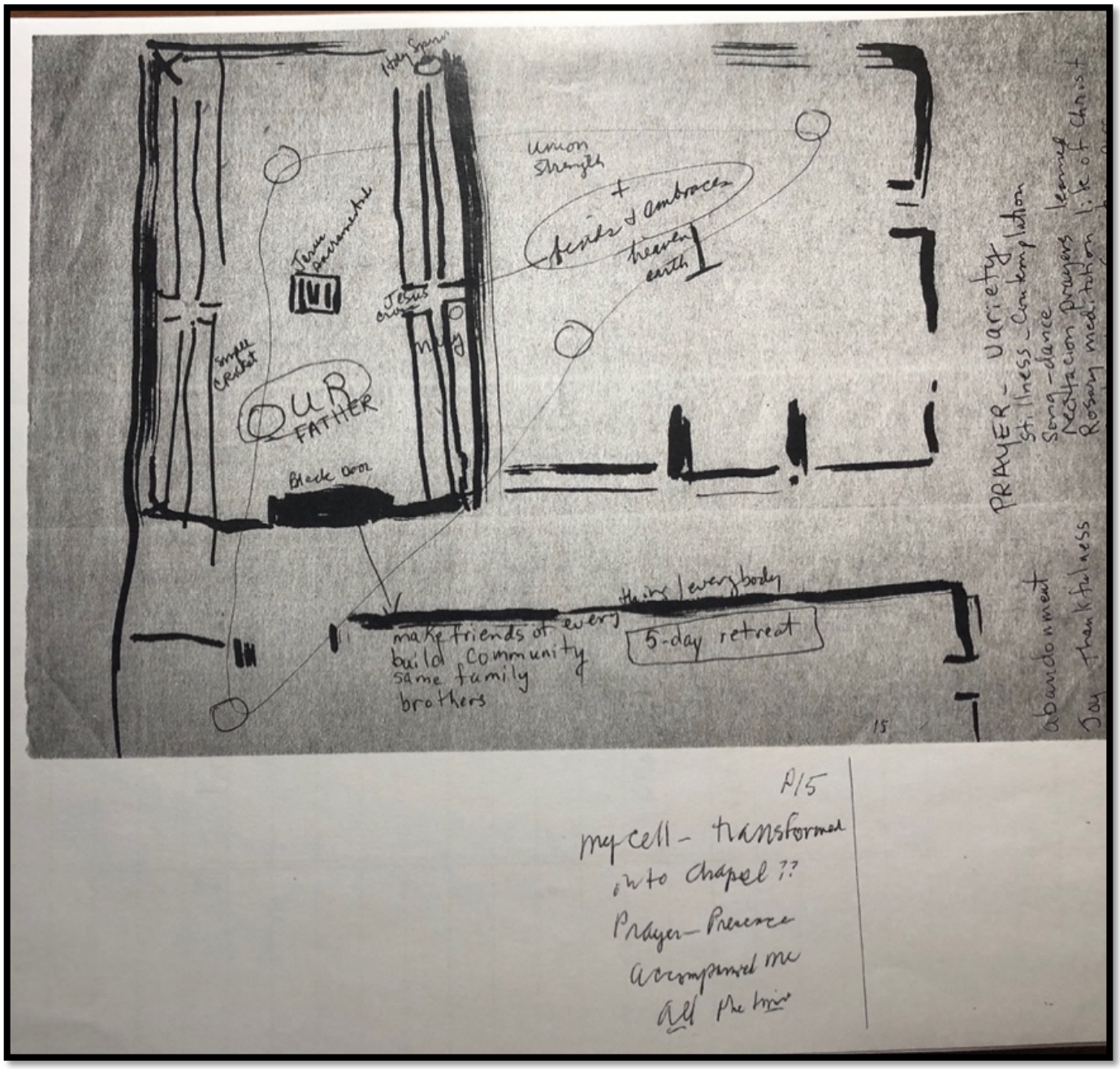

Fig. 4.4. Handwritten map of the prison encampment and cell of Sister Jean Reimer, O.P. Cir. 1981.[665]

[665] Central America File. Sister Jean Reimer, O.P. folder. Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.

her position on Liberation Theology.[666] She was questioned about Father Luis Eduardo Pellecer, who had been kidnapped and recently returned and who had renounced his social justice activism. Had she heard of him? Did she know he had supplied the military with information regarding the subversive activities of the church? Did she know informers gave them information about *her* subversive activities and the violence she preached?[667] Throughout her captivity, Sister Reimer deftly answered her interrogators' questions, and sought to steer clear of providing any information that would have given the impression that the group was involved in subversive activities. She knew using Liberation Theology's Base Ecclesial model of teaching "leadership formation," and using the "dignity of the human person," to refer to the poor, as she and Sister LaValley had done, was indeed considered subversive by the military.[668] In fact, prior to their abduction, Reimer and LaValley hid any lists of leaders within their community, in a move to protect their catechists and themselves from charges of subversion. They instructed the Maryknolls to refrain from sending them "newsletters, brochures, etc." as it was "hazardous," and requested that material be sent to Marywood to be held there until their return to the United States.[669]

On Monday, November 23, Sister Reimer and LaValley were removed from their cells. They were told they were going to be set free. Unbeknownst to Reimer and LaValley, the U.S. State Department, pressured by Marywood Sisters and hundreds of other organizations and individuals, had worked tirelessly for their return. Reimer, reflecting on her captivity, remarked that "while I think they (the military), while we were doing things that they wouldn't want us to do," such as teaching leadership skills and "basic human dignity," they were looking for other

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[666] Sister Reimer reported that at the time of her abduction she was wearing a "simple blue skirt and a very modest long-sleeved pink blouse and sandals." Central American Files, Sister Jean Reimer folder, audio tape, Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[667] Central American Files, Sister Jean Reimer folder, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.
[668] Sister Reimer interview with author.
[669] Central American Files. Sister Helen LaValley folder, Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.

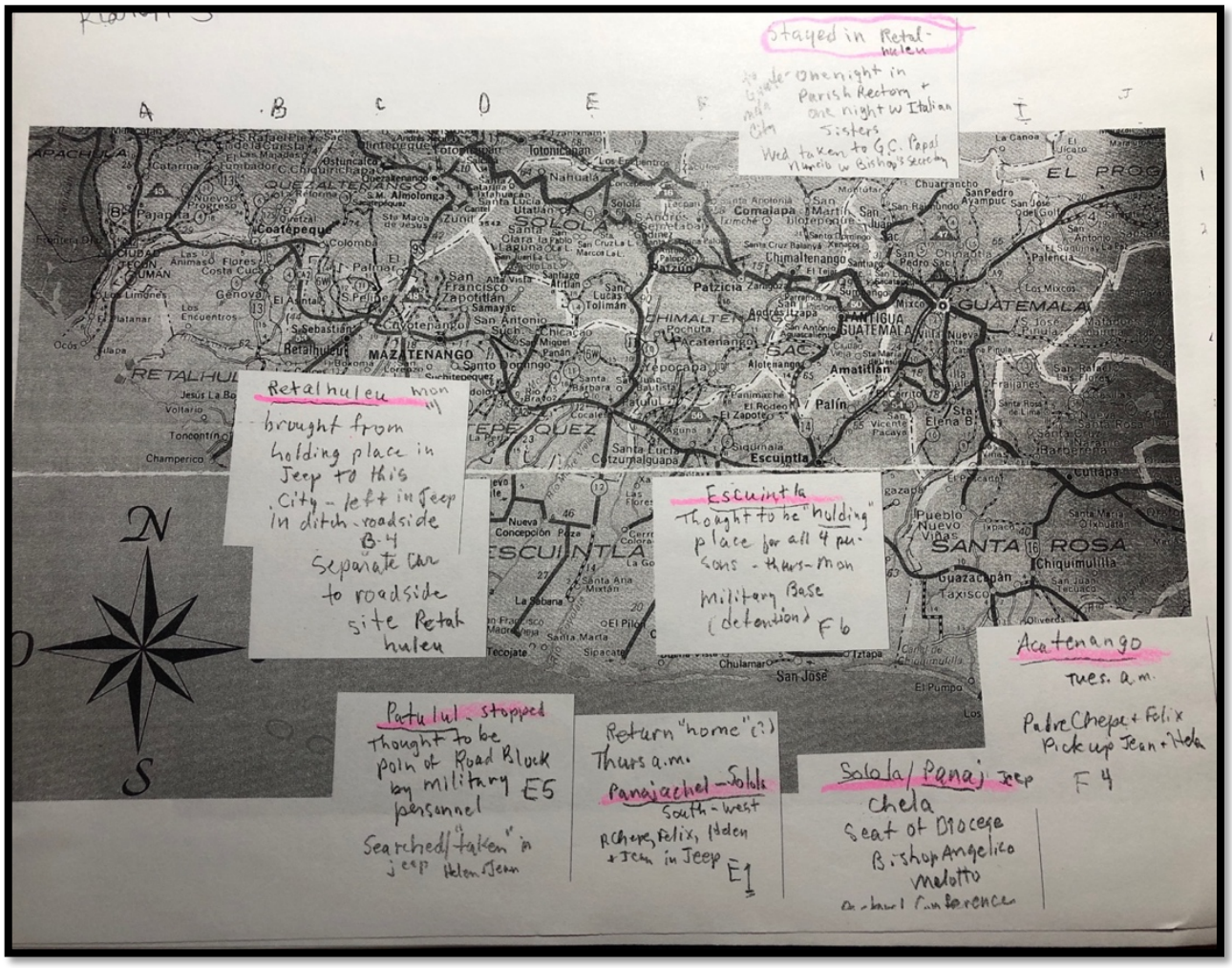

Fig. 4. 5. Sister Jean Reimer's notes on a Guatemalan map. Notes reflect her thoughts on where she believed she was held and released.[670]

who had probably been more open about their activism.[671] It is difficult to know exactly why the foursome was released, whether it was because it was a case of mistaken identity or pressure from the State Department, or for other unknown reasons, but it was unusual for Catholic activists who were abducted by the military to survive their ordeal. Padre Chepé remarked afterward that he was

[670] Central America File. Sister Jean Reimer folder. Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[671] Ibid.

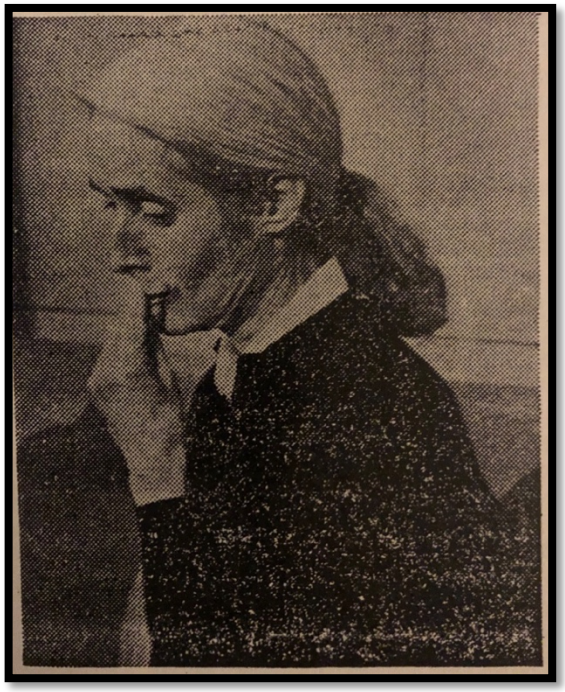

Fig. 4.6. Sister Jean Reimer, O.P. Press conference after her return to the United States, 1980.[672]

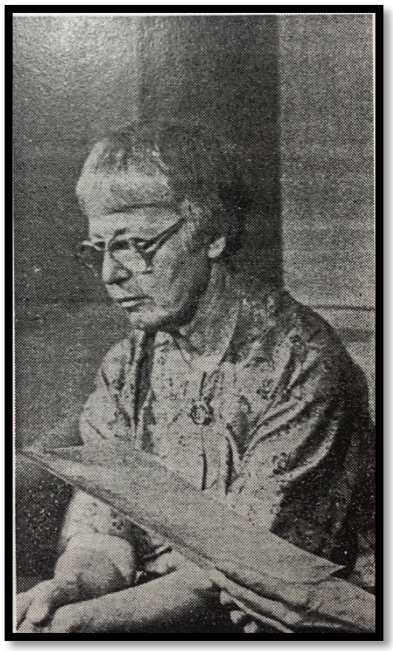

Fig. 4.7. Sister Helen LaValley, O.P. Press conference after her return to the United States, 1980.[673]

[672] Photo courtesy of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[673] Ibid.

certain that if Sisters Reimer and LaValley, who were Americans, were not with him, he would not have survived.[674]

Upon their arrival to the United States, on the recommendation of the State Department, Sisters Reimer and LaValley spoke little of their abduction and captivity to protect Padre Chepé and Felix who remained in Guatemala. After a period of healing, both Reimer and LaValley continued working on social justice issues. Sister Reimer traveled to Russia after the fall of communism to assist Catholics who were being introduced to the encyclicals of the Second Vatican Council for the first time, and Sister La Valley joined the Marywood Sisters working for the abolition of nuclear weapons. On Easter morning, 1992, she joined Sisters Platte and Gilbert at the Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda, Michigan, breaking into the base to protest the nuclear weapons on that base.[675] For this action she spent six months in federal prison at the age of 80 for her action. She passed away in 1995 when she was 84 years old. Sister Jean Reimer continues to reside at Marywood and still tells the story of her kidnapping and captivity and of the friends she left behind. Neither Sister returned to Guatemala.

Conclusion

Initially drawn to Latin America in the early 1960s to address the needs of the poor and in response to the Catholic Church's fear that communism was siphoning Catholics away from the fold, Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters quickly adopted the Second Vatican Council's call to meet the spiritual *and* the physical needs of those they served in Peru, Honduras, and Guatemala. Drawing on Liberation Theology's "preferential option of the poor," and Vatican II's encyclicals, they often ministered in ways that threatened Latin American governments' authority, by teaching

[674] Central America File. Sister Jean Reimer folder. Archives of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood.
[675] Darci McConnell, "Nun to Begin Serving 6 months Prompted by Protest," *The Grand Rapids Press,* August 23, 1992.

leadership skills and promoting the dignity of the poorest people in their communities, who, in turn, agitated for structural changes in their countries. These actions often put the Sisters and those they served in danger. Determined to live out Gospel values despite the extremely dangerous situations they ministered, they also risked their lives during earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. Their willingness to sacrifice their lives, was, at times, at odds with family, friends, and Marywood leadership teams, who valued the Sisters as much as the missionary Sisters valued the lives of those they served.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters have a long and rich history of religious life that dates from the thirteenth century in France. As with many religious orders, Dominican Sisters led lives of contemplation and prayer. In the mid-19th century, they moved from their cloistered convents to begin community ministries focused on teaching and nursing young girls in Catholic institutions, a tradition that has lasted over two-hundred years. The mid-twentieth century, however, brought new challenges and radical changes to Women Religious in the United States, including the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters.

As the Second Vatican Council and the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s coalesced, the Sisters expanded their ministries and identities as Women Religious. Accordingly, they meticulously studied the principal encyclicals of Vatican II, especially *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium*, which urged Sisters to address the world outside Catholicism and move beyond their schools and hospitals to serve the most marginalized and vulnerable people in society. The Councils' encyclicals also redefined the Catholic Church as the "people of God." They no longer placed clergy above laity with a strict hierarchy of bishops and popes to be rigorously obeyed at every turn.[676] As Sister Mary Navarre noted,

> The principles of collegiality and subsidiarity, of deep study of Scripture and foundational principles, all the result of Vatican II, led to a commitment to social justice, critical thinking, and actions on behalf of the poor and marginalized peoples of the world. It led to a closer commitment and adherence to the teachings and life of Jesus.[677]

Along with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the reforming encyclicals inspired the Sisters to pursue new social justice ministries. Their identities as Women Religious

[676] The Second Vatican Council's liberalizing reforms continue to be hotly contested, especially with the installation of Pope Francis in 2013, who has attempted to steer the Catholic Church back to the documents of the Council after the retrenchment of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict to preconcilliar ideas and standards.
[677] Interview with author, November 3, 2021.

were transformed from women who, for the most part, acquiesced to authority figures to women who decided their mission was to "go where they [were] needed" and use their specific skill to help people on the margins of society. The Dominican Sisters often faced harsh criticism for their work in the world and at times their social justice activism put them in dangerous situations. They were often criticized for stepping outside the boundaries of what the Catholic Church and some members of the public considered to be acceptable activities for Women Religious. They clung to their faith, however, and their belief in the necessity of their social justice projects. Since the end of the Second Vatican Council the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters fought to carry through with their social justice ministries despite the criticism and dangers they faced.

Criticism against Women Religious in the United States reached a zenith in the twenty-first century when the Vatican, under the leadership of Pope Benedict XVI, launched a sweeping investigation, called the Apostolic Visitation. The Vatican specifically targeted progressive congregations of Women Religious, including the Grand Rapids Dominicans. A separate investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the largest organizing body of prioresses and their leadership teams, was launched the same year. The first investigation, the Apostolic Visitation, was initiated on January 30, 2009, by the Institutes for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL).[678] Apostolic investigations "are typically a means through which the spiritual well-being of an ecclesiastical institution . . . can be assessed."[679]

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[678] The Institutes for Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life is "responsible for everything which concerns institutes of consecrated life (orders and religious congregations, both of men and of women, secular institutes) and societies of apostolic life regarding the eremitical life, consecrated virgins and their related associations, and new forms of consecrated life."
https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccscrlife/documents/rc_con_ccscrlife_profile_en.html.

[679] Dawn Araujo-Hawkins, "Apostolic Visitations, Common but Often Difficult to Trace," *Global Sisters Report,* December 8, 2014, https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/apostolic-visitations-common-often-difficult-trace-16421. For the history of apostolic visitations, see Margaret Cain McCarthy and Mary Ann Zollman, *Power of Sisterhood: Women Religious Tell the Story of the Apostolic Visitation,* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2014).

Conducted ostensibly out of concern for the dramatically falling numbers of women entering consecrated life and the "quality of life" of Sisters in their religious communities.[680] The Vatican's investigation of the LCWR was announced less than a month after the Vatican announced its Apostolic Visitation. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith (CDF) which exists to promote and protect Church doctrine, conducted the LCWR investigation.[681]

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious is "the association of the leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States." [682] It has about 1350 members "who represent nearly 80 percent of the approximately 38,000 women religious in the United States."[683] It was founded in 1956 and "assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today's world."[684]

The investigation of the LCWR, of which the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters are members, lasted until 2012. The Leadership Conference was accused of promoting "radical feminist themes" and encouraging "models of leadership that privileged dialogue over clear exertion of authority and had tolerated dissent against bishops and other Church officials."[685] In April 2012, the Vatican censured the LCWR, assigned an archbishop, J. Peter Sartain of Seattle,

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[680] For more information on the Apostolic Visitation, including the Vatican's approach to the visits, materials, final reports, and testimonials, see "Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States," http://www.apostolicvisitation.org/en/about/index.html. Information on the investigations on individual convents remains confidential, and the convents under investigation have not received permission to review the reports on their visits.

[681] Both investigations were approved by Pope Benedict, who, before his election to the papacy was the Prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and was considered a hardliner. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/storia/documents/rc_con_cfaith_storia_20150319_promuovere-custodire-fede_en.html; Congregatio Pro Doctrina Fidei, "Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious," The Vatican, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20120418_assessment-lcwr_en.html.

[682] Leadership Conference of Women Religious, https://lcwr.org/about.

[683] Ibid.

[684] Ibid.

[685] "Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious," the Vatican. See also Amy Koehlinger, "American Sisters Haven't Strayed. The Vatican Has," *Religion & Politics: Fit For Polite Company*, July 20, 2012, https://religionandpolitics.org/pid=1948 for more on the doctrinal assessment.

and two bishops, Leonard Blair of Hartford, Connecticut, and Thomas J. Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois, to oversee the LCWR's "renewal." Sartain was charged with reforming "the group to align more consistently with what Rome deems to be proper 'doctrine," especially the Magisterium's teaching on women's roles in the church, the family, and human sexuality.[686]

The LCWR was to be placed under the authority of Sartain and the bishops for up to five years.[687] On LCWR's part, the leadership hoped for "open and honest dialogue," with the members of the oversight committee. They hoped as well that it might "lead not only to increasing understanding between the church leadership and women religious, but also creating more possibilities for the laity and, particularly for women, to have a voice in the church." The LCWR stated, however, that they would reconsider discussions with the oversight committee, "if it is forced to compromise the integrity of its mission" even to the point of separating from Rome and forming a non-canonical organization if they could not come to a consensus with the Vatican.[688] In the meantime, the LCWR tried to "not to allow the work of the CDF to absorb the time, energy and resources of the conference nor to let it distract the conference from the work its mission requires."[689]

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[686] Koehlinger, "American Sisters Haven't Strayed." The Catholic Church "reserves the sacrament of Holy Orders to men. This means that women cannot be deacons, priests, or bishops and effectively excludes them from all higher levels of Church service and authority where ordination is a prerequisite." Catholic teachings on sexuality are also conservative: sex outside of marriage and homosexual activity is forbidden." Gender and Sexuality," Pathos, https://www.patheos.com/.

[687] The Vatican especially opposed the LCWR's support for women's ordination and some LCWR member's support for abortion rights and homosexuality.

[688] Joshua J. McElwee, "LCWR Will Continue Dialogue, But Not Compromise Mission," *National Catholic Reporter,* August 10, 2012. LCWR File, Archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood. The most famous split from Rome came in 1970 when four hundred Immaculate Heart of Sisters (IHMs), surrendered their vows and status in the Roman Catholic Church and became a lay ecumenical community. This controversy began after the Sisters implemented reforms, according to the precepts of the Second Vatican Council. Their renewal, which was similar to hundreds of other congregations around the country, was vehemently opposed by the local bishop. For this history see, Anita M. Caspary, *Witness to Integrity: The Crisis of the Immaculate Heart Community of California,* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2003).

[689] Ibid.

The investigation of the LCWR did not impact the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters directly, "except to be stunned by the heavy-handed assault on the leaders without prior discussion, conversation, or effort (by Rome) to know the organization."[690] Apart from the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters expressing shock at the Vatican's five-year mandate over the LCWR, the Sisters remained quiet and kept their discussions about the controversy to their board meetings.[691] Given that the LCWR investigation coincided with the Apostolic Investigation it signaled the hostility of the Vatican and a very real threat to the order's self-governance. Concerns were raised among the Sisters that the Vatican was threatening their autonomy and the autonomy of thousands of other Women Religious in the United States. Despite the threat, the Marywood Sisters remained supportive of the LCWR. They drew on their long history of navigating opposition as a source of strength. In a 2012 letter from Dominican Sister Maria Fabiola Velasquez, she recounts the story of Dominican Sister Catherine of Siena, who:

> also faced assessment by and oversight from her own Dominican Brothers. In 1374, she had to submit to a full interrogation by the Friars who were meeting in a General Chapter, since some of them were afraid of her and doubted her orthodoxy. She finally convinced them but they required that she take a confessor and a guide (a controller?), Raymond of Capua. We also know that Catherine was highly sensitive to the question of unity within the Church . . . Catherine offered her constant prayer as well as her energy to unite a broken Church. Remarkably, Catherine's love for the Church enabled her to be both faithful to the Church and yet critical of the faults that were evident among the clergy and the papacy of her day.[692]

Maya clearly saw the Vatican's hostility toward the LCWR and the Grand Rapids order as a similar

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[690] Email. Sister Mary Navarre to author, September 18, 2020.

[691] I was unable to locate board meeting minutes regarding both investigations in the Marywood archives. For Women Religious outside of Marywood who have written about the LCWR controversy, see Annmarie Sanders, IHM, ed., *However Long the Night Making Meaning in a Time of Crisis: A Spiritual Journey of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018); Annmarie Sanders, IHM, ed., *Spiritual Leadership For Challenging Times: Presidential Addresses from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014); Sister Simone Campbell, *A Nun On The Bus: How All Of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community* (New York: Harper One, 2014).

[692] Maria Fabiola Velasquez Maya, O.P., letter to the Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood, May 31, 2012. LCWR Folder, archives at Grand Rapids Dominicans at Marywood.

Religious trials that called for similar energies.

In April 2015, the Vatican abruptly ended its oversight of the LCWR. It is largely believed that Pope Francis, who was seen as "less interested in having the church police doctrinal boundaries than in demonstrating mercy and love for the poor and vulnerable—the very work that most of the women's religious orders under investigation have long engaged in," was eager to resolve the controversy.[693] The Vatican may also have been moved to end the investigation because of public outrage at what was seen by many Catholics and non-Catholics as the Vatican harassment of the Sisters. Many saw the Church's treatment of Women Religious as children even more offensive, at the same time the Church was doing little to address the massive sexual abuse scandal.[694] While Women Religious across the country breathed a sigh of relief at the conclusion of the LCWR investigation, the Apostolic Visitation was still ongoing.

On February 2, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI celebrated World Day for Consecrated Life. The celebration. Begun by Pope John Paul II in 1997 the celebration was "intended to help the entire Church to esteem ever more greatly the witness of those persons who have chosen to follow Christ by means of the practice of evangelical councils."[695] Two days later, the prefect of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, Cardinal Franc Rodé, publicly chastised Women's orders in the United States. He described them as being in a state of "crisis," due to the

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[693] The LCWR did make some concessions with the Vatican, "rather than take a confrontational approach." The LCWR agreed to take measures to "promote a scholarly rigor that will ensure theological accuracy and help avoid statements that are ambiguous with regard to Church doctrine or could be read as contrary to it." Puella; Laurie Goodstein, "Vatican Ends Battle With U.S. Catholic Nuns' Group," *The New York Times,* April 16, 2015. See also Nicole Winfield, "Vatican Unexpectedly Ends Controversial Crackdown of U.S. Nun Group," *The Advocate,* April 18, 2015, https://www.theadvocate.com/nation_worl/article_d873b57e-690b-5781-afe7-aada94b8c497.amp.html.

[694] Jason Berry, "A New Inquisition: The Vatican Targets U.S. Nuns," *Global Post,* December 18, 2012; Charles Honey, "In Defense of the Sisters: Local, National Groups Protest As Vatican Blasts Nuns Organization," *The Grand Rapids Press,* May 3, 2012; Charles Honey, "Vatican's Crackdown On Serene, Hardworking Nuns Is Baffling," *The Grand Rapids Press,* May 1, 2012; "Nuns to the Vatican: Quit Picking on Our Sisters," *NBC News,* May 9, 2014, https://nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nuns-vatican-quit-picking-our-sisters-n101856.

[695] "Message of the Holy Father John Paul II For The 1 World Day For Consecrated Life," The Vatican, 1997, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccscrlife/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_06011997_i-consecrated-life-day_en.html.

"adoption of a secularist mentality and the abandonment of traditional practices."[696] Rodé initiated the Apostolic Visitation the previous year, targeting "noncontemplative Women Religious," who "are uncloistered and who engaged in active ministries."[697]

Conservative Catholics who were disturbed by many of social justice ministries of apostolic Women Religious triggered the Apostolic Visitation when they reported their concerns to the Vatican.[698] Traditionally, Sisters "had worked in congregationally sponsored institutional ministries such as teaching and nursing," but by the twenty-first century, many Sisters "were engaged in pastoral ministry, spiritual direction, and social justice-related activities."[699] These were seen as outside the scope of the women's religious orders. Conservatives, also were alarmed with "a precipitous decline in membership" in Sisters' communities. They blamed the Sisters' focus on social justice issues and their lack of traditional lifestyles for the decline in recruits.[700] In the mid-1960s, there were approximately 160,000 vowed Women Religious. By 2000, that number

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[696] James Martin, S.J., "Cardinal Rodé: Religious Life in 'Crisis,'" *American Magazine,* February 5, 2010, https://www.aemricamagazine.org/content/all-things/cardinal-rode-religious-life-crisis.

[697] Margaret Susan Thompson, "Circles of Sisterhood: Formal and Informal Collaboration among American Nuns in Response to Conflict with the Vatican Kyriarchy," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion,* Vol. 32, No. 2, (Fall 2016), 64.

[698] Some observers suggested that the combined investigations "were a coordinated attempt by conservative forces in the Church following a conference held at Stonehill College, in Massachusetts" in 2008. Speakers at the conference included the conservative journalist Ann Carey, who regularly railed against Women Religious who did not conform to pre-Vatican II norms. Also speaking at the conference was Cardinal Rodé, who placed the blame on the Sisters' so-called untoward behavior on "misguided hermeneutics—or interpretation—of documents of the Second Vatican Council," describing "this interpretation as a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture based upon a false concept of the church and hence of the council." Other speakers claimed that "progressive leadership of religious orders" threatened the Catholic character of the orders," and discarding "symbols in religious life, such as common dress and communal living," were detrimental to religious orders. Thomas C. Fox, "Stonehill Symposium Played Role in Women Religious Study," *National Catholic Reporter.* November 4, 2009, https://www.ncronline.org/print/news/global-sisters-report/stonehill-symposium-played-role-women-religious-study. See also, Phyllis Zagano, "Ministry by Women Religious and the U.S. Apostolic Visitation," *New Blackfriars,* (2011), 591-606.

[699] Thompson, "Circles of Sisterhood," 65.

[700] Ibid.

had fallen to about 80,000.[701] The reasons for this decline were both complex and varied, but conservative Catholic groups blamed Women Religious for abandoning their traditional roles.[702]

When Cardinal Rodé announced his intention to launch the Apostolic Visitation in 2009, most Women Religious were "astounded."[703] They were "not aware of any problems widespread and grave enough to warrant an apostolic visitation across a whole nation."[704] Further, while the investigative panel targeted Women's orders, the same concerns that instigated the Visitation "could easily apply to men religious, whose numbers have also declined and who might also have benefited from such pastoral concern."[705] Still, the men's orders were not included in the investigation.[706] Further, women's orders in Europe had a "far more longstanding and drastic" decline in vocations, yet the Vatican did "not extend pastoral concern to these congregations through national apostolic visitations."[707] They also did not look at non-apostolic Women's orders, whose members lived a more traditional lifestyle and whose ministries were usually limited to

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[701] Ibid.

[702] The reasons behind the decline in the numbers of Catholic Women Religious are complex. There is no one reason why women choose not to enter vowed religious life. More opportunities for women for careers and expressions of spirituality and stricter entry policies are just a few reasons. It is also important to note that the mid-twentieth century's high watermark of young women entering orders was an anomaly. Religious life for women has never been static. For millennia, numbers have ebbed and flowed. The way spiritual life manifested itself has also changed as Women Religious adapt to the circumstances around them. For more on this topic, see Anton Lingier and Wim Vandewiel, "The Decline of Religious Life in the Twentieth Century," *Religious Life in the Twentieth Century,* Vol. 12 (May 2021), 1-25; Margaret Susan Thompson, *The History of Women Religious in the United States,* Now You Know Media, topic 16, 17.

[703] Margaret Cain McCarthy and Mary Ann Zollmann, eds., *Power of Sisterhood: Women Religious Tell the Story of the Apostolic Visitation,* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2014), 23.

[704] Ibid.

[705] McCarthy and Zollman, 23.

[706] Ibid.

[707] McCarthy and Zollman, 23. Worldwide, "European nuns regularly fare the worst, Latin American numbers are stable, and the numbers are rising in Asia and Africa," Nicole Winfield, "Vatican Women's Magazine Blames Drop in Nuns on Abuses," *Global Sisters Report,* January 2020, https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/news/news/vatican-womens-magazine-blames-drop-nuns-abuses; Matthiew Brejon De Lavergnée, "Catholic Sisters in Europe: Between Social Demand and Public Regulation (19th-21st Centuries), *EHNE,* (Fall, 2021), https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/gender-and-europe/religion-and-gender-in-europe/catholic-sisters-in-europe.

teaching and nursing.[708] Rather, it appeared that the reason for the Visitation was rooted in conservative church opposition in "the years following Vatican II."[709] It further was "intimately connected with the contentious process of receiving the Second Vatican Council" and adherence, or lack-there-of, "to patriarchal norms for women's behavior."[710]

The investigation, which lasted for five years, involved "341 religious institutes of both diocesan and pontifical right, to which approximately 50,000 women religious throughout the United States belong."[711] The Vatican appointed Mother Mary Claire Millea, the superior general of the Catholic Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as the "Visitor," "granting her the faculties to design and carry out the Visitation.[712] She, in turn, chose a core team of American religious who assisted her throughout the process."[713]

The Visitation process was divided into four phases. During the first phase, "all the Superior Generals of Institutes of Women Religious involved in the visitation were invited to speak with or write to," Mother Millea, "to share their hopes and concerns for their institute."[714] During the second phase, what many Sisters saw as an intrusive three-part questionnaire was circulated to congregations of which "empirical data and qualitative information regarding the spiritual, community and ministerial life of the individual congregations," were gathered.[715] The

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[708] Only about twenty percent of Women Religious in the United States are considered conservative. These congregations typically follow pre-Vatican II traditions for Women Religious, including wearing of the habit, living communally and ministering in schools and hospitals.

[709] Kari J. Lundgren, "The Apostolic Visitation and the Rhetoric of the 'Good Nun': Identity Norms in Discourse Representing American Catholic Sisters," *Women's Studies in Communication,* Vol. 39, No. 3, (2016), 326-346.

[710] Ibid.

[711] "Apostolic Visitation Final Report," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, December 16, 2014, https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/consecrated-life/apostolic-visitation-final-report.

[712] Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, https://www.ascjus.org/; http://www.apostolicvisitation.org/en/about/sistermaryclare.html

[713] Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States: Mother Mary Clare Millea, A.S.C.J." Apostolic Visitation Final Report." http://www.apostolicvisitation.org/en/about/sistermaryclare.html.

[714] Ibid.

[715] Ibid. The Visitation questionnaires for congregations can be accessed at, Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States, Reference Materials, https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/consecrated-life/apostolic-visitation-final-report.

questionnaire "sought information related to congregational membership, living arrangements, the ministries in which members participate, spiritual life, including the practice of prayer and the frequency of Mass attendance, and the promotion of vocation."[716] The nature of the investigation, especially the questionnaire seemed to "validate concerns expressed privately by some sisters that they are to be dressed down or accused of being unfaithful to the church."[717]

Some congregations refused to answer the questions and simply sent their congregational constitutions to Mother Millea. Others were selective, choosing to answer only those questions that they were comfortable answering. In response to the questionnaire, Marywood released a statement to their congregants, which notes the guarded measures leadership took towards the inquiry and their adherence to following the directives of the Second Vatican Council, which they believed put them on solid ground with the Vatican:

> The Apostolic Visitation of Institutes of Women Religious in the United States Questionnaire for Major Superiors has been submitted. Since the document is considered a canonical investigation, canon lawyers were consulted. The canonical advice was to respond as much as possible with quotations from our (Vatican) approved Constitution. Our answers in the document reflect the clearest and most accurate expression of our life in response to the call of Vatican Council II to return to Scripture and the spirit of our founder, Saint Dominic.[718]

Responses to the Visitation inquiries were "to determine which religious communities will receive visits," which would be the third phase. The Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters were chosen as a site which deemed a necessary visitation. Congregational visits began in early 2010, with Marywood's visitation taking place in the fall of 2010.

There are no documents in the archives at Marywood regarding the Visitation that detail what the actual visit to Marywood looked like or why the Vatican believed an investigation into

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[716] "2009 in Review: Apostolic Visitation of US Women Religious Moves Toward 2010 Visits," www.archbolt.org.
[717] "Vatican's Apostolic Visitation Has Some Sisters Fearing Possible Reprimand For Drifting Too Far Left," *The Grand Rapids Press,* September 12, 2009.
[718] "Apostolic Visitation Update," *In Word,* April 2009.

Marywood was necessary. What is known has been gleaned by anonymous interviews with Sisters and the congregation's history, *Tapestry in Time.*[719] While minimizing the impact the Visitation had on the order and speaking highly of those who conducted the in-house investigation Sisters privately expressed incredulity, anger, and great sadness that leaders of the church had instigated an investigation that made them feel extremely misunderstood and disrespected.[720] One Sister noted that the investigation "felt invasive and abusive," and that, "many of us felt sad to have to invest energy into the visit itself along with the questionnaires, not to mention the cost that the individual congregations were asked to pay. It took time, energy, and resources to allay the fears, confusion, and rumors."[721] This was the church, after all, that the Sisters had devoted their lives to serving. Many Sisters expressed dismay, hurt feelings, and humiliation at the patriarchal tone the Vatican took.[722] Despite the fears and anger the Sisters felt, they skillfully faced the controversy, noting that they "had years of practice since Vatican II working through impasses. We know how to avoid polarizing language and emotional reactions. We all knew how to 'stay at the table' even when the conversation was painful and frightening. We knew how to do it. We had been doing it for forty years."[723]

The fourth and final phase of the Apostolic Visitation took place took place when the Vatican received Mother Millea's final report and summary of general issues.[724] Reports on each

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[719] Navarre, *Tapestry in Time, 283.*

[720] Anonymous interviews. During the Visitation, the Vatican was inundated with letters by Catholics and non-Catholics alike, demanding that the investigation be stopped. Sisters in other congregations expressed similar views of anger, sadness, and humiliation, a violation of privacy, and regret at the "deep wounds" the process created among Women Religious. Thomas C. Fox, "Abuse of Episcopal Authority in Apostolic Visitation Created Deep Wounds," *National Catholic Reporter,* December 17, 2014; Kathleen Duffy, "Apostolic Visitation: Sisters Learn From the Starlings," *Global Sisters Report,* August 15, 2015.

[721] Anonymous interview with author. July 2020.

[722]The Sisters received the Visitation team graciously, and it was reported that "pleasant" conversations took place. Interview, anonymous. It is reported that Cardinal Rodé asked the United States bishops to pay for the Visitation, costing approximately $1.1 million. Mother Millea "declined to say what, if any, funding has been contributed to her office. She also declined to otherwise discuss how the study is being funded." "2009 in Review."

[723] Anonymous interview with the author. November 30, 2021.

[724] "Apostolic Visitation Final Report," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, December 16, 2014.

congregation remain confidential. The congregations that were investigated were not allowed to read the reports and they may never be made public. The Vatican released a statement that directed Women Religious in the United States to "carefully review their spiritual practices and ministry to assure that these are in harmony with Catholic teaching about God, creation, the incarnation and the redemption."[725]

Despite the concern and pain the two Vatican investigations created, the Sisters remained committed to the Chruch and their domestic and international ministries and did not alter their social justice programs.[726] Marywood Sisters were also buoyed by the outpouring of support of many Catholics and non-Catholics who "voiced support for the Sisters and dismay that their lives were being questioned by the Vatican."[727] The investigations, especially the Apostolic Visitation, also enabled Sisters to "transform the process through engagement in prayerful response."[728] The Visitation that was "intended to suppress their capacity to claim and retain authority over their own ways of life accomplished just the opposite."[729] Historian Margaret Susan Thompson noted that

> As the process evolved through what feminist writer Amndee Hochman once termed 'everyday acts and small subversions,' it became what the sisters involved repeatedly called a 'gift': 'a strong gift to carry into the future.' During the five years that the (Apostolic Visitation) was carried out, they acknowledged the 'gift of solidarity' and renewed appreciation for their diverse charisms that 'was gift indeed.' Sisterhood took on a new dimension of collaborative witness—within communities, among communities, nationally, and even internationally.[730]

Now We Are Leaving Our Home

Today, the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids face new challenges. Having to close their campus to the public due to COVID-19 beginning in March 2020, Marywood also lost five Sisters

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[725] John Hopper, "Vatican Backs Down and Gives Mild Rebuke to American Nuns," *The Guardian,* December 2014.
[726] Mary Navare, interview with author, December 3, 2021.
[727] Navarre, 283.
[728] Thompson, "Circles of Sisterhood," 81.
[729] Ibid.
[730] Ibid, 81.

to the deadly virus. Sister Sandra Delgado, O.P., the current prioress, recently wrote "our lives came to a halt from one day to the next." [731] While the internet, including ZOOM meetings, allowed the Sisters to continue their ministries and other responsibilities, the Sisters also found ways, however, "to come together as we banged pots and pans from our apartments, stood on porches with lit candles, sang songs and made music together using internet tools like Zoom."[732]

The summer of 2021 brought another difficult challenge: the transfer of the ownership of their Motherhouse, nearly one hundred years after they laid its cornerstone, to a development company. Because of the declining number of Sisters, now standing at approximately 160 women, compared to its zenith of 950 a half a century ago, and the cost of maintaining the building, the Sisters made the difficult decision to sell their iconic structure. The new owners, the 3CPK Development Group, will convert the Motherhouse into affordable housing for seniors. The Sisters will continue to own and operate the Marywood Health Center, where Sisters who live on campus will reside, and Aquinata Hall, the assisted living residence for Sisters. Business offices and the archives are being moved to rented offices in downtown Grand Rapids, while the leadership team arranges a more permanent setting.

Sister Mary Navarre, reflecting on the memories she and other Sisters have of the first time they saw the Motherhouse noted that those recollections are "etched in our memories as we anticipated our new lives as Dominican Sisters." "Donning our somber postulant uniforms, we looked about and found our new classmates wide-eyed with wonder, trepidation, and

[731] Sister Sandra Delgado, O.P., "From the Prioress," *Mission & Ministry: Time as Gift, Challenge, Healer,* Vol. 22, (Summer, 2021), 2.
[732] Ibid.

excitement."[733] It did not take long for young postulants to become familiar with the Motherhouse and make it their home. But "now we are leaving our home."[734]

How will the Sisters' social justice ministries be impacted by this move? Prioress Delgado believes that "while the composition of the property will change, neither our mission nor our ministries are tethered to the bricks and mortar of our buildings. This is an initial step with many additional decisions yet to be made. We cannot predict at this point what our ministries will look like but we look forward to all the new ways they will continue."[735] As demonstrated in this dissertation, the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at Marywood worked tirelessly to bring justice to those in need regardless of the barriers they faced. There is little doubt, then, that regardless of where the Sisters reside in the future, their mission to serve the most vulnerable and their social justice activism, as individuals and as a congregation, will continue.

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[733] Sister Mary Navarre, "Changes on Marywood Campus," *Missions & Ministries: Time as Gift, Challenge, Healer,* Vol. 23, (Summer 2021), 7-8.
[734] Ibid.
[735] "Interview With Sandra Delgado, O.P., Sale of Motherhouse Building at Marywood," Grand Rapids Dominicans, July 29, 2020. https://grdominicans.org/answers-about-sale-of-building-at-marywood/.

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ABSTRACT

SISTERS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE: THE SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVISM OF THE GRAND RAPIDS DOMINICAN SISTERS

By

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May 2022

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Major: History

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"Sisters of Social Justice: The Social Justice Activism of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters," examines the late-twentieth-century social justice activism of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters at the local, national, and international levels. It addresses the opposition to their social justice activism by the Vatican and other institutions at the local and national levels and the dangers they faced when ministering abroad. It argues that within the opposition and dangers they faced, and their responses to these challenges, we can see the agency of the Grand Rapids Dominican Sisters.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Elizabeth K. Chamberlain is an instructor in the Aquinas College History Department and the Women's Studies Department since 2009. She received a B.A. in History from Aquinas College (2007) and holds an M.A. in History from Central Michigan University (2009). With the completion of this dissertation and fulfillment of doctoral requirements, Chamberlain will thereby hold a Ph.D. in History from Wayne State University (May 2022).

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Chamberlain resides in Rockford, Michigan with her husband, Nicholas where she resides on her small farm which includes miniature donkeys and ponies. Chamberlain's pride and joy are her five grandchildren, Marcus, Micah, Eliana, and twins, Theodore and Francis.