

Our Charism also lives here and it lives on

Contributed by different sisters

Associate Relationship in the USA Province

Sr. Kathy Wiesneski, Co-Director of the Associate Relationship, Merrill, USA Province

We began talking about such a relationship in the early 80's. First Associates were Sandra Kennedy, Louisiana, John and Mary Bartol and Anna Hlebichuk, from Wisconsin. In 2010 we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the covenant of Sandra Kennedy, and John and Mary Bartol with us. Our peak year was at the end of 2009 when we had 40 Associates. As of April 14, 2014 we have 34.



Associates in Merrill

This relationship has developed over time. We have had some difficulties at times and have grown through our pain. At this point Associates are invited to some of our meetings and gatherings. They have also taken responsibility and meet on their own for support and for planning for charitable endeavours. We keep the entire

Province informed of how the Associates are sharing our charism through the monthly Newsletter in which we include an "Associate Update". Associates are also members of committees which include two of our Transformational Strategic Plan committees.

Through one of the Strategic Priorities, we are now looking at the future of this relationship with the likelihood that in some years there will be no Holy Cross Sisters for these Associates in the US. A committee of five Associates, 2 Holy Cross Sisters and a facilitator has opened up the dialogue about what the future may hold.

In order to discover exactly where each of the Associates are in developing a strategy for the future, the committee sent out a survey. Some of the issues addressed in this survey were:

- Will the Associates continue the charism through their life's example and ministry?
- What could this "new" relationship look like?
- How can Associates and Sisters construct the foundation for what may come?

The answers to these questions are in the hands of the Spirit. □

In the "Theodosia" further contributions have already appeared on the subject: 1991, 3; 1998, 2; 2002, 2; 2004, 1

Community "Tree of Life" of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross in Hegne

Sr. Dorothea Maria Oehler, Hegne, Province Baden –Württemberg

In 1995, together with some young women who wanted to live a contemporary form of Franciscan spirituality, we set out on search for an appropriate way of life. During a Eucharistic celebration in 1999, four women made a pledge for a temporarily binding membership. Thus we can look back on the experience of 15 years.



The group is in front of the Cross of Hegne

Rootedness, growth, vitality, these keywords mark, the development of the Community "Tree of Life" over the years.

It is rooted in the spirituality of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, and the convent in Hegne is often experienced as a place of spiritual power, and, in union with the Sisters, as a spiritual home. In addition, it is rooted in the union of the members, in their mutual help and interest in different circumstances.

The community has grown in numbers: currently 37 persons belong to it, 34 women and three men. 22 men and women are already members, eight women will be received into membership this year in September, and after having taken part in an introductory weekend in November 2013, six women have opted for the one-year orientation phase.

The members have grown in their sense of shared responsibility for the way and the goal of the community. Since last autumn two women are working with the leadership team, and they also share responsibilities at the three common weekends and the one day meetings of the community.

The community is not finally grown due to the challenges that it faces again and again. It is not always easy for everyone to meet the different needs, and it takes a great deal of openness, to accept and affirm the diversity of lifestyles as enrichment on the common path.

The vibrancy of the community shows up again and again in the fraternal cooperation, the exchange of experiences, in the common prayer and in the dedicated involvement when organizing events in our Hegne convent. This includes work input such as driving or cleaning at the renovation site of the Provincial House. Noticeable is the keen interest of individuals in additional offers such as guided retreats, hiking retreats, pilgrimages: to Santiago, to Sister Ulrika (Hegne) to Mother Mary Theresa (Ingenbohl) and so on.

The community shows its vitality in the celebration of feasts and anniversaries, such as the jubilee of sisters, birthdays, personal memorial days, etc. Together with the members of the Community "Tree of Life" we thankfully look back on the past 15 years. We wish the community a good way into the future, in solidarity with the Sisters of the Holy Cross. May God's blessing accompany them and continue to give them liveliness and vitality. □

About the Community "Tree of Life" the Theodosia had reported in the previous years, such as : 1998,2 ; 1999,4 ; 2004.1 ; 2010.1 .

"Theresian Circle" in the Croatian Province

Sr. Karmela Dominković, Đakovo, Province Croatia

How the "Theresian Circle" originated

At that time of the beatification of Mother Mary Theresa we prepared ourselves nine months for this event.

Ever since an average of 250 to 300 devotees of the Blessed gather for devotion and for the pilgrim Mass in our convent church in Đakovo every 16th of the month. Also, many people write trustingly down their big and small concerns as well as

favours received into a register of petition and favours received through their powerful intercessor.

After the year 2001, when people had learned more about the life of Mother Mary Theresa, the devotion to her increased. In addition to the monthly celebration of the Holy Mass, a parallel program came into being, which gradually developed into a pastoral ministry for adults in the sense of a new evangelization. The devotees joined together in prayer and gave themselves the name "Embroidery of prayer". The group now has more than 400 devotees throughout Croatia.

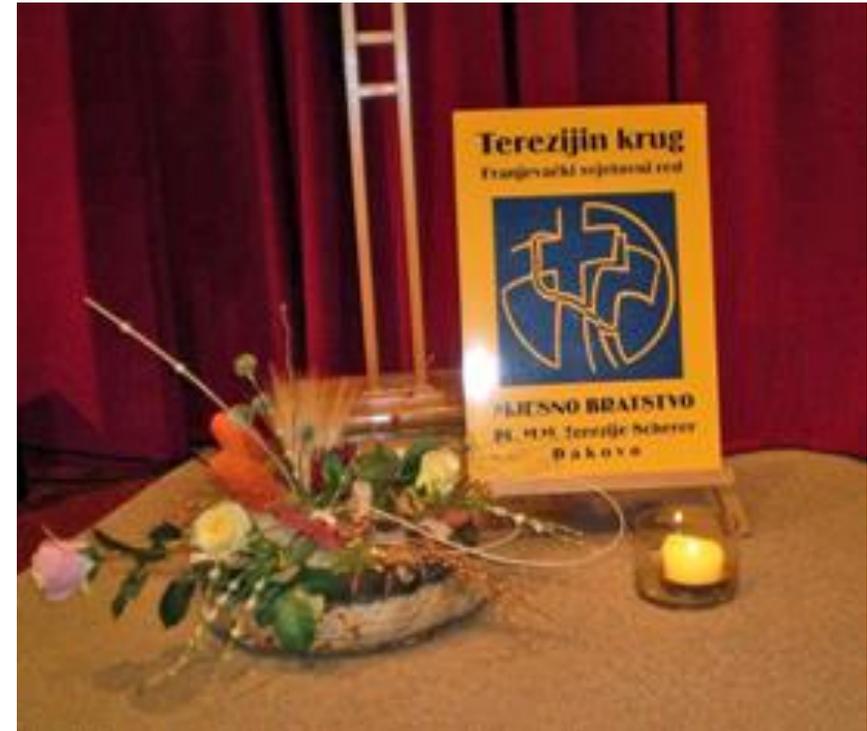
That same year, the group began to look at the life of Mother M. Theresa as Mother of the Poor, which led to the mission called "The poor for the poor - among us ". The love for Jesus Christ should be awakened in the hearts of the participants, as well as the desire for a deepening in prayer and for receiving the sacraments more often. Therefore the "Holy Cross Oratory" was founded in our convent in 2002. The early Christians with their works of charity should be the model for those involved. Soon the group was named "Theresian Circle" by the neighbours. The fundamentals of this new religious community are the weekly "Lectio divina" in order to deepen the content of the Holy Scriptures and full day meetings as "Day of Silence - contemplative Saturday". These are held on the Saturday before the first Advent Sunday, before the first Sunday of Lent and on a Saturday between the Solemnity of the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and the feast of St. Francis. This led to the desire for an annual retreat. The members of the "Theresian Circle" also deepen the general human and Christian values and take Mother Mary Theresa and St. Francis as models.



Theresian Circle, Đakovo

Founding of the Local Fraternity SFO

Devotees of Mother Mary Theresa wished for a deeper life according to the Gospel and the Rule and the Constitutions of the Franciscan secular



The Logo of the Franciscan Secular Order

order, so the "local fraternity of the SFO" (Secular Franciscan Order - Franciscan Lay Order) has been founded in our convent in 2004 under the special protection of Blessed Mother Mary Theresa.

Today this fraternity is the heart of the entire "Theresian Circle". It has more than 60 professed brothers and sisters.

Each local fraternity of the SFO is a visible sign of the Church - a community of faith and active Christian love. The connection to the church, to the Franciscan community and its mandate must be constantly deepened. The entire SFO program

is in line with the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of “Christ fideles laici” (On the Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World) by Pope John Paul II in the year 1988.

The self-understanding of the members of the "Theresian Circle"

They see themselves as Christians, who

- in addition to Sunday Mass participate in the Eucharistic celebration every 16th of the month
- according to the model of the early Christians, strive to live the Word of God in their daily lives and remember every Friday “The Crucified love that is not loved”,
- participate in the various activities and are eager to help those in need whenever possible,
- commit themselves to promoting human and Christian values in their families and stand for the dignity of every human person from conception to death,
- often pray the rosary for present and future vocations and thereby participate in the universal mission of the Church.

The "Theresian Circle" is open to all who seek help, and for those who want to extend their help. Some members are committed to different present-day overtures.

Though being part of the "Theresian Circle", the church choir in Našički Brezik as well as some prayer groups are functioning outside the city of Đakovo. The average age of the members is between 30 and 50 years. Many are unemployed; others are in search of truth and love, still others are burdened with life-threatening situations.

The program lives on the tangible help of Blessed Mother Mary Theresa, on the prayerful support of the members of the SFO fraternity, on that of our religious

community, especially of the sick sisters, on the modest contributions of our benefactors and supporters and on personal contributions of the members. The program can be traced under www.fsr-djakovo.com.

Summary

Priorities of the program are: spiritual support and social engagement. Both find their expression in various forms and offers according to the conviction of our founders: "The need of the time is the will of God."

Circle of Friends (Associate members) in Taiwan

Sr. Jermia Thoma, Chulu, Vicariate Taiwan

How did it happen that in Taiwan, we launched a circle of friends? Several women who have been friends with some of our sisters wanted to get acquainted with our spirituality. In autumn 1998, we organized an orientation day. Quite a number of women came who wanted to know what this kind of “circle of friends” was all about. Sr. Ai- Tschüen Wu and Sr. Jermia Thoma conducted the program. Those who wanted to participate in an intensive formation registered themselves into the list of participants. Ten women (some married, others single) signed up. Their training began in the beginning of January 1999. In the first year they met for formation in the Vicariate House on every second Saturday, and later once a month. Our objective: The participants should get to know our charism, so that they could live it in their own everyday lives.

Subject matter of the Formation:

“The need of the time is the will of God.” (Fr.Theodosius Florentini)

- Foundation History (Mother Mary Theresa, Father Theodosius)
- History of the Institute
- History of the Vicariate
- The spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

- Yearly Letter of the Superior General
- Recollection days
- Working with the Charism Booklet (from the time we got it)

"The spirit of our community is the spirit of the Gospel." (Article 1 of the Constitution)

Hence we work with the Holy Scriptures:

- Introduction to the Scriptures
- Women in the Bible
- Various Vocations
- Introduction to Psalms
- Familiarization with the four Gospels
- Spirit of the early church (Acts of the Apostles)
- Letters of St. Paul
- Important Documents of Vatican II



Sr. Jermia Thoma with the associates in Taiwan

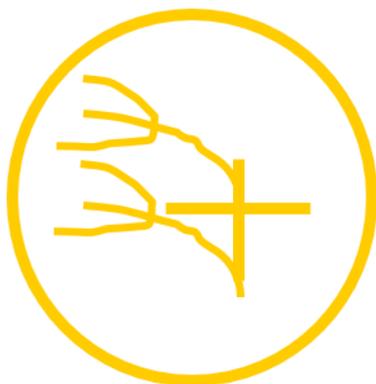
On the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross 2002, the first six women could be admitted into our circle of friends. Two of them had once been our candidates, two are staff members in our institutions and the other two are actively engaged in parish work. A woman wrote on the day of admission: "I particularly love the sentence of Mother

Mary Theresa, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross: 'Do what lies in your power day by day'. It helps me in my daily life to do everything, whether important or unimportant, with all my heart. Studying the Bible in common, listening to each other and seeing how each of us incorporates the words of Scripture into her daily life, help me to deepen my own spiritual life and to support the others in doing so."

After their admission the Associates are committed to:

- Daily read the Scriptures for 15 - to 20 minutes.
- Participate at least once every second month in the Lauds or Vespers and the celebration of the Eucharist with the nearest community of sisters
- Daily pray, the prayer of St. Francis before the Crucifix of San Damiano.
- Every second month spend a day doing volunteer work in one of our institutions or any other social institutions.
- Make a three days retreat every year. This can also be done in connection with the annual retreat of the Sisters.
- To assist the sisters at major feasts of the vicariate or at the occasion of the death of a sister.

In return, they are invited to participate in the festivities of the sisters' community. Unfortunately this is often not possible for those who work in our institutions. They are also free to join the picnics of the sisters if they wish to do so.



The symbol of Membership

As a visible sign of membership, the new members were given a brooch with the old Chinese symbol of friendship (This symbol means: friends who work in the same spirit).

The bond of friendship with us is expressed by the cross. The cross is our source; from there we daily get the strength for our service.

After their admission the participants expressed the wish to have a monthly meeting. They have a friendly relationship, a sisterly bond with us sisters.

□

Associates of the Vicariate Brazil

Sr. Gabriella Di Mauro and Sr. Magdalena Brokamp, Salvador, Vicariate Brazil

Trusting in the vitality of our charism, the participants of the General Chapter 1984 discussed the question whether lay people could participate in our charism and spirituality in a binding way. The General Chapter 1990 encouraged the Provincial and Vicariate Administrations to venture into such an experiment in a way suited to their specific situation. In our annual meetings we have time and again considered such a possibility for in our Vicariate.

These days the parish in Santa Rita, Diocese of Nova Iguaçu, Rio de Janeiro, was celebrating its 40th anniversary and that of the mission of our sisters there. From the beginning we have done our pastoral work in collaboration with lay people. In this collaboration in good and difficult times, our spirituality and the vitality of our charism as a guideline and source of strength became visible. Thus the desire to deepen these values and to participate in them was awakened in some parish members

On 8th May 2009, these lay people formed a community and named it "Semente da Santa Cruz" - Seed of the Holy Cross. They are accompanied by two sisters (Sr. Gabrielle Di Mauro and Sr. Magdalena Brokamp). The community consists of twelve members: married couples, widows and unmarried. They work in the metal industry, as postman, teachers and educators. All are active members of the parish of Santa Rita and participate in various services: Communion helpers, catechists, conducting the Liturgy of the Word and marriage preparations.



Associates in Brazil with Sr. Gabriella di Mauro

The monthly meetings are held either in the house of the sisters or in families. On this occasion, various forms of prayer are practiced: a popular form of the Divine office and the "Lectio Divina", the sharing in Bible meditations. The topics that are discussed and deepened refer to our charism, to the Spirituality of the Cross, to St. Francis and Clare, our founders and blessed sisters, to the history of our institute and the Vicariate and to ecclesiastical documents. The liturgical celebrations and feasts of the Institute are incorporated and celebrated as far as possible

Besides the sisters who directly accompany the community "Semente Santa Cruz", the other sisters are occasionally invited, too, in order to enrich the formation with their experiences.

During the time in which the community was constituted, we could observe with joy a personal development of its members, both with regard to the parish as well as in the relationship to their families. We also experienced their increasing interest in the life of our institute and of the Vicariate. Their sense of co-responsibility was particularly felt during the jubilee of last year in which they actively participated. All are hopeful that in the near future the guidelines will be confirmed, and that the members can then commit themselves for two years. □

"Source" – Associates of the Province Slovakia

Sr. Ľubomíra Kollárová, Lendak, Province Slovakia

Our founders were open to the signs of the times. By this we know today how important it is that we share the gifts of the charism with those Christians who feel called upon to live their faith more intensely as Associates. (Drawing from the Source)

The Spirituality of Blessed Zdenka Schelingová attracted many admirers in our country from the outset. And soon there came the question how the laity could participate in the wealth of our charism.

I should like to demonstrate the spreading of our charism among the laity by some personal statements made by members of the newly formed community "Source".

"The Life of Blessed Zdenka has really touched me. That's why I took part in the recollection days of Blessed Zdenka. When I met Sisters of the Holy Cross in Dolny Smokovec and had the opportunity to get to know their congregation, I thought: 'The Lord is calling me' and felt a lot of joy "(Marta, 58 years).

All faithful are called to holiness of life in God. In connection with the church, they follow the personal spiritual path. In the church there are many spiritual communities with different charisms. God himself puts into the human heart the longing to belong to a community. He leads them until this longing is fulfilled.

"Your charism has moved me internally and touched me. I want to learn from you to understand the wisdom of the Cross, and get to know the charism that you have received from God to pass it on. I consider it a grace that I can take an active part in this work, which lives on in the world since the time of your founders "(Eva, 61 years).

After having completed two years of training in the jubilee year of Mother Mary Theresa Scherer, the following were incorporated into the community, "Source" in the presence of the Provincial Superior, Sr. Benjamína Novotná, Mgr Eva Strníšková, Marta Žuchová, Johana Leštinská, Eva Pazúriková, Rudolf Zbonka, Anna Bokorová and MUDr. Margita Heglasová.

The Community ' Source ' is a private association of the faithful who live their Christian vocation in their ordinary surroundings and in their everyday life. In that way they take part in the charism and mission of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross.

The community lives according to the statutes, which were approved and confirmed by Monsignor Jan Orosch, Archbishop of Trnava, on September 18th, 2013 - in accordance with the canon law, section on "Associations of the Faithful".

The training of the members of the community "Source " began in 2010. Meetings were held quarterly, mostly in the Province House in Trnava, always on a weekend. The participants were introduced to the basic values of spiritual life and of our charism.

"The formation meetings with the sisters deepened my knowledge of God, the origin of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross, the founders and the charism of the Institute " (Anna , 66 years).

During the training, particular emphasis was put on the Word of God as the primary source of all Christian spirituality. The participants learned the importance of meditation and sharing of the Scriptures. "I want to draw from the source, which is Jesus Christ. I want to bring the fruits of the spiritual experience into the environment in which I live. With the help of the Holy Trinity and the training given, I learn to fulfil the will of God in the needs of the time "(Margita, 62 years).

Drawing from the source of Franciscan spirituality in common, the participants discovered the basic values of the spirituality of our congregation and searched for possible ways to implement them in their daily life.

The next topics were the life history of our founders and blessed sisters what impressed them deeply. Ms. Johana had been forced to leave our congregation during her candidacy at the time of liquidation of the religious orders. She has found joy and the fulfilment of a new in the community "Source ".

"Since I was not allowed to remain in this religious community during the totalitarian system, I now can live the charism and spirituality and spread the legacy of Mother Mary Theresa Scherer, Father Theodosius, Sr. Ulrika and Sr. Zdenka. "(Sr. Johana, 86 years).

During the training the participants were given an opportunity to experience our sisters more closely. They participated in the times of prayer, in the Eucharistic celebration, in the hours of adoration and in the common activities in several communities. They could visit the local communities, eat with them, discuss and concretely see their charitable and educational missions. Thus mutual trust, solidarity and cooperation with the sisters were strengthened more and more.



Associates with Sr. Benjamína Novotná, Sr. Viktoria Kapustová and Sr. Ľubomíra

Together with us - as a community - the members of "Source" are called to more deeply understand the mystery of the cross and resurrection, and from there to draw confidence, hope and strength. They are called to see the world and the people as the image of God, to appreciate and honour their dignity. They are also called to become more and more a Franciscan Minor who lives in merciful love and solidarity with the people and for the people, especially for those who are discriminated, and to understand the various challenges of our time and a to seek for appropriate responses.

The fields of their apostolic activities are first and foremost their families, the workplace, the parish and each challenging human suffering in their environment. They should spread the devotion to Blessed Zdenka, to Blessed Mother Mary Theresa Scherer, to Blessed Ulrika, help the needy in their environment and assist the Sisters of Mercy in various apostolic activities.

"I want to support the community of prayer, love and peace in the family and in the parish. I want to keep and foster true and living faith in my family." (Eva, 61 years).

We are very grateful to God for the community "Source" and for the entire path that we have gone so far with its members. We are pleased that our charism is spreading through the Associates, especially there where they work: in the pharmacy, in the prison, in the dental clinic, in their parishes and in their own families. Blessed be God for everything!

The "Group Ulrika "in Kosovo

Sr. Franciska Molnar, Priština, Province Croatia

When at the time of the General Visitation ten years ago, we were looking for the most appropriate date for the founding of the " Region of Kosovo ", divine providence seemed to cooperate in its own way, namely by our dear Blessed Ulrika Nisch. She was chosen the patron saint of the region, which came into existence on 8 May 2004.

Later the newly built boarding school for women students, too, was named after her. Shortly thereafter, a group of women of the surroundings of Pristina began to meet with the sisters - a new mission for the sisters besides their present pastoral work. The goal was to offer support to Christian women living in a predominantly Islamic environment and to build up their mutual relations. Almost spontaneously they called themselves "Ulrika Group". In each letter of the name Ulrika discovered an impetus which provided them with guidelines to manage the challenges of their daily lives.

During the last years, they not only continued their meetings, but also developed various forms of commitment, namely visiting old and lonely people, not only talking with them, but also giving assistance in their apartments wherever needed. With time their openness for the pastoral needs of the parish was also growing: Involvement in the various liturgical celebrations, organizing meetings for the

elderly and the sick. Among other things the members of the group were occasionally offered a three days retreat and group excursions. All this contributed towards an increased interconnectedness and openness towards others. The group is directed by the sisters Smilja Micaković and Leona Gjini.

We are grateful to the Lord for the beautiful experience of the beginning days and years. Last year, the jubilee year of the Blessed Ulrika, the group received new members. In addition, after the change in the provincial leadership, new sisters came to the group: sisters Lendita Spaqi and Franciska Molnar took over the coordination and spiritual guidance.

When planning and preparing the program, the sisters draw upon the cycle of the liturgical year. Thus they are responding to the desire of



Sr. Lendita Spaqi and the members of the group at a common celebration

the members to religiously animate their daily life. Christmas and Easter have become the highlights of all activities.

During Lent 2014 Pope Francis gave the impetus for various activities. He pointed out that the wounds of poverty disfigure the face of humanity and cry for healing. At a meeting of the Council and later at a meeting of all members, the Lenten program was worked out and accepted. Assistance for poor children and their families was set as a priority. Each of the women gave her best in making various handicrafts. The whole parish was invited to help raising money for the poor by the purchasing such work

A meeting for elderly, sick and lonely people was organized in the hall of our boarding school before Easter (and before Christmas). The Eucharistic celebration was followed by happy get-together. The members of the "Ulrika Group" generously got involved in the preparation of cakes, juice and small gifts. Everything was home made.

All the meetings, workshops and get-togethers take place in our house, i.e. in the hall of the boarding school. There are regular monthly meetings as well as weekly workshops. 20 to 30 women actively participate in the group. There are also some who cannot come due to illness or old age; however they happily participate in retreat weekends or occasional celebrations.

A youth group "The Youth Network of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross" is also active in our next neighbourhood. Earlier this year the young people surprised us having taken some points in common with the "Ulrika Group" into their program for the year 2014. The students identify themselves with this group, i.e. with our charism, and emphasize that they too belong to us sisters.

It is our wish that we - like our founders - might listen to the Gospel and let us be confronted with the poverty of our brothers and sisters, that we may allow ourselves to be touched by it and take practical measures, as Pope Francis pointed out in the Lenten sermon. □