

Lumen

Sr. Celestine Cepress, Founder
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Sr. Thea's life honored in new book March marks 20th anniversary of her death

By Jessica Weber
Lumen editor

Many Viterbo students may not know of Sr. Thea Bowman. However, that may soon change after they read "Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman," by Sr. Charlene Smith, Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA), which "tells Thea's inspiring story to as wide an audience as possible," said Sr. Smith.

"The basic message of 'Thea's Song' is that young Thea saw something she liked (FSPA) and wanted to be a part of it," Sr. Smith said. "She was drawn and led by Fancis' authenticity, and she saw her ministry in FSPA as an avenue for building the black Catholic and universal Christian identity."

Sr. Smith was friends with Thea for 35 years. The two met in 1954 in the St. Rose dining room. They both returned to Viterbo during the 1970s, Sr. Smith as Dean of Students and Sr. Thea as a teacher, and later the chair of the English department and director of the Hallelujah Singers at Viterbo.

The biography was released Jan. 30 this year by Orbis Books, a New York publishing house that focuses on the global Christian faith. The

book was also co-authored by John Feister, a writer and founding editor of www.AmericanCatholic.org. Feister spent two years researching and interviewing members of the black community for their perspective.

In addition to Feister's research, Sr. Smith had researched the life of Thea while she was coordinator of the Thea Bowman Legacy and used writings, interviews, and photographs of Thea to show Sr. Thea's spiritual life and legacy.

The book shows Sr. Thea's "impact on black Catholicism, on the FSPA, and on me," Sr. Smith said. "When I closed the final draft of the book, I felt Thea's joy. She is somebody who seems to be more alive in the minds of a lot of people than she was before she died."

The book tells the story of Thea's life in five parts: Childhood, Thea in La Crosse, Thea in Washington D.C., Thea at Viterbo, and Back to Canton.

Thea was born in 1937 and grew up in Canton, Miss. She was raised Methodist by her parents but at the age of nine she wanted to become Catholic so she was baptized into the Catholic Church by Fr. Justin Furman. Six years later in 1953,

Thea joined the Franciscan Sisters' community in La Crosse and in 1956 was given the name Sister Thea, which means "of God." Thea went on to teach and after completing her doctorate, she returned to Viterbo to teach in the English department.

In 1980, Thea helped found the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, La. "Thea's spirituality was built on black sacred song, ritual and dance," Sr. Smith said. "It is important that people get to know her because she encouraged the Catholic Church to embrace black ritual and song in the liturgy."

In 1984, Sr. Thea was diagnosed with breast cancer. Even though she was in treatment, she continued to go on speaking engagements, teaching, and performing. For the next five years, Sr. Thea was honored for her spiritual activism and she received many awards, including the U.S. Catholic Award for furthering the cause of women. The National Black Sisters' Conference recognized Thea with



Sr. Thea Bowman. Photo contributed by Sister Charlene Smith.

the Harriet Tubman Award and Viterbo honored Thea with the Pope John XXIII Award in 1985.

In 1987, "60 Minutes" featured Sr. Thea. Correspondent Mike Wal-

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Students help restore coastline over spring break

By Sarah Lieser
Campus Life editor

For 21 Viterbo students, spring break consisted of trudging through marsh water- harvesting spartina plants, planting on dredge for coastal restoration, and helping build homes.

Viterbo Campus Ministry sponsored the 2010 spring break service trip to Galliano, La. Pat Andera, Viterbo campus minister, told Lumen, "It is one thing to learn from college professors. It's a completely other life experience to travel to a new state and get your hands dirty while serving."

After over 20 hours of travel to Louisiana, students got comfortable at Golden Meadows Plant Facility where they were housed for the week. The group started the week working with the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP), committed to restoring and preserving the estuary system of Louisiana.

"Louisiana's coastline has been slowly disappearing," said Mel

Landry, public involvement coordinator of BTNEP. Since 1930, an area the size of Delaware has been washed away from erosion due to powerful tropical storms.

Kelsey Lauer, senior nursing major from Burnsville, Minn., enjoyed the unconventional service work, is used to serving people. "We were servicing the planet by helping restore the coastline for generations to come," Lauer said.

To do their part to help restore the coastline, Viterbo students helped harvest spartina plants from the Golden Meadows facility. Students walked around in water just below their knees while their feet sank into the mud as they pulled the plants from the ground.

Andy Christopherson, junior accounting major from Unity, Wis., described the pond as "slippery, slimy, goopy, and wet."

"It was funny to see if people could stay up," Christopherson said. Sharing jokes and singing as they worked, the students harvested over 7,000 spartina plants.

The spartina plants were then transported to Port Fourchon Mari-



Viterbo service trip group at the beach in La. Photo contributed by Sarah Lieser.

time Ridge, where the plants were planted in a newly pumped body of sediment had been placed for coastal restoration.

The spartina plants grow quickly, and have a strong, deep root system that holds together the sediment during storms and rough water, helping to prevent erosion and protect the main lands, Landry said.

Tori Pohl, junior biopsychology major from Menomonee Falls, Wis., was impressed with the amount of work the group accomplished. "It was exciting to look up and down the shoreline to see the plants we planted and imagine what the marsh would look like once every-

thing grows," Pohl said.

Mandy Jo Mlsna, a freshmen nursing major from Spencer, Wis., had her first experience working with the environment. "It was great doing service for the environment," Mlsna said. "We cannot see the direct impact of our work, but we know we are making a difference. In the long run, er don't know who is being affected by the service we did."

The students ended the day with a quick swim in the ocean after working beside it all day. For Jackie Lutes, junior nursing major from Benton, Wis., it was the first time she had seen the ocean. Lutes

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Sr. Thea fought for change throughout her life

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lace introduced her by stating: "Today at 49, Sr. Thea is still shaking people up, preaching in her African robes, not the traditional white Catholic litany, but a new black Catholic Gospel powered by the conviction that when something is wrong, you change it."

After years of fighting cancer, Sister Thea knew her life on earth was coming to an end. She told Fr. John Ford to tell everyone at her funeral that "[She] wasn't going to die. [She was] going home like a shooting star."

On March 30, 1990, Sr. Thea passed away. She is buried beside her parents in historic Elmwood Cemetery in Memphis, Tenn. This March marks the 20th anniversary of Sr. Thea's death.

A mass will be held at her gravesite and many of Sr. Thea's friends and admirers, including Sr. Charlene and fellow FSPA sisters Jean Kasparbauer, and Dorothy Ann Kundinger, will gather to honor her life.



PHOTO from HERALD, CANTON, MS - JUNE 5, 1986



Left: Sister Thea with Mike Wallace of "60 Minutes." Right: Sister Charlene Smith, FSPA. Photos contributed by Sister Charlene Smith.

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Lumen Mission

The mission of *Lumen* is to provide a medium of communication among members of the Viterbo community. Included are impartial reports on campus events and other information of interest to the community.

It should stimulate thinking and serve as a forum of opposing views on issues, and it should show the relationship of the campus to the city, national and world events. It should also provide students with the opportunity to learn production skills and to be responsibly free in selecting material and preparing the layout and design of a newspaper. *Lumen* is in its 52nd year of publication. It is produced by the students of Viterbo University. Editorials and columns reflect the opinions of the individual authors and not necessarily the views of advertisers or Viterbo University. *Lumen* is printed by Monroe County Publishers. *Lumen* is published six times per semester on a bi-weekly basis. Deadline for copy is Thursday at 3 p.m. in the *Lumen* office, in the basement of Marian Hall.

Lumen Letters Policy

- Letters to the editor are encouraged to promote the free expressions of varying opinions on campus.
- The content of such letters is the responsibility of the writer.
- *Lumen* Editorial staff reserve the right to edit lengthy or defamatory letters.
- Letters must include signature, address, phone number, and affiliation with Viterbo University as a sign of good faith (eg. John Johnson, MHN rm.# 190, Ph. # 796-3190, sophomore business major). Only the writer's name and affiliation with Viterbo University will be printed in *Lumen*.
- The letters policy reflects the opinion of the Editor and Assistant Editor.
- Letters may be slipped under the *Lumen* office door.
- Submission of a letter does not guarantee publication.

Viterbo University Mission Statement

Viterbo, a Catholic, Franciscan, ecumenical University prepares students for leadership and service by providing a student-centered, values-based, learning-focused liberal arts education rooted in the values of human dignity and respect for the world.

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