

Thea News

VOLUME 7 NUMBER 11 MARCH 2008



*"If we love
Thea, we will
continue our
efforts
to perpetuate,
extend,
and deepen
her virtues,
attitudes, and
approaches
to living with
faith, hope,
and love...."*

*We will...
continue doing
as she did,
saying with a
resounding:*

*no to
destruction
and yes
to creativity;*

*no to injustice
and yes
to universal
access;*

*no to greed
and poverty
and yes
to sharing;*

*no to oppression
and yes
to freedom;*

*no to lies and
yes to truth;*

*no to violence
and yes
to peace;*

*no to death
and yes to life.*

—From *Thea Bowman:
Handing on Her Legacy*,
Introduction, pages ix-x;
edited by
Christian Koontz, RSM

Pilgrimage to Thea-land

by Linda Manternach

In the summer of 1989 my husband (not at the time) Dean and I had the opportunity to meet [Sister Thea Bowman](#) in her home in Canton, Mississippi. We were both working with high school youth in a parish in Iowa and took them to Mississippi for a service opportunity. We were working with the FSPAs ([Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration](#)) in Camden. They asked if we would be interested in meeting Sister Thea. Of course, we jumped at the possibility. She was so welcoming to us. She was getting ready to meet with the U.S. bishops. I knew I was in the presence of a very holy person. This brief encounter made a lasting effect on Dean and me.

Three years after getting married, it was time to name our first child. It was an easy choice for the girl's name; it would be Thea. Our Thea was born on June 20, 1994. She has lived up to her name; she is strong and caring and very playful.

Thea Manternach turned 13 in 2007. As a way of recognizing her move toward adulthood, it was decided that I, her mother, would take her on a pilgrimage. It was time for her to have a better understanding of who her namesake was and what it means to be a woman of faith. On June 11, 2007, Thea, LaDonna Manternach, BVM (Thea's godmother), and I set off for Mississippi. To accompany us, several women (family and friends) sent letters of support and encouragement about what it means to be a woman of faith today.

The first night we made it to Memphis, Tennessee, and spent the next morning wandering around the historical Elmwood Cemetery where Thea Bowman and her family are buried.

"Pilgrimage to Thea-land" *continued on page 7*



Photo: Courtesy of Linda Manternach

Thea Pilgrimage friends (l to r): Angela O'Leary, Dorothy Ann Kunderinger, FSPA, Doris O'Leary, Linda Manternach, and Thea Manternach beside Bowman house.

From the TBL Coordinator

March 1, 2008

Dear Friends of Thea,

La Crosse, Wis. 2007 marked the 70th birth anniversary of beloved **Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA**, (1937-1990). As you know, Thea was born during the joyous holiday season, on the Fifth Day of Christmas. In La Crosse, we celebrated December 29.

Canton, Miss. Through an act of stunning generosity, Doris O'Leary purchased the family home of Thea in Canton, Mississippi. Doris has already set up facilities to tutor area children. Future plans include renovating space for prayer and quiet retreats. (See story on pages 4-5.)

U.S.A. Thea continues to appear in articles. Awards are given in her honor. She is also in new books and cartoons. You can read about many Thea sightings in this newsletter. Richard McBrien, Notre Dame University theology professor, recently wrote in his column, *"We do not know how history will finally situate Sister Thea Bowman among its panoply of significant figures who made a lasting impact on the lives of others.... [H]er legacy is likely to be far richer and more broadly-based than now appears—not only for African Americans, nor only for religious and lay women, but for many, many others as well, both inside and outside the Catholic community of faith."*

In 2006, the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops published the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. Already over 200,000 copies have been sold. Thea graces Chapter 8, "The Saving Death and Resurrection of Christ: Singing the Lord's Praise—With a Challenge." A 12-issue feature newsletter "Catechism for U.S." is available from St. Anthony Messenger Press. The 16-CDs audio book came out in 2007. In 2008, a Spanish print edition will be published. Thea's inspiration reaches thousands via these significant publications.

Pittsburgh, Penn. Pittsburgh Steelers owner and president Dan Rooney, friend of Thea, welcomed attendees to the spacious Heinz Field East Lounge for the 11th annual Thea Foundation fundraiser, April 19, 2007. We celebrated our Thea Scholars and honored **Wynton Marsalis**, "the most outstanding jazz musician and trumpeter of his generation." Marsalis, a native of New Orleans, Louisiana, recently composed and performed three pieces for Ken Burns' *The War*. He was presented the Thea Bowman Foundation Award for the endless ways he gives of himself through charitable works, development, and music scholarships. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan proclaimed Marsalis "an international ambassador of goodwill" and appointed him a U.N. Messenger of Peace.

After speaking about bringing others into his orbit, not just for photo ops, but as a way of life, Marsalis performed trumpet solos, to the delight of fundraiser attendees. The dinner and auction were successful, as usual, helping to fund tuition for African American college students. Raves to the event organizers! April 23, 2008, is this year's fundraiser. Same venue.

Loretto, Penn. Congratulations to Mary Lou Jennings! St. Francis University (the first Franciscan college [1847] in the U.S.) awarded her an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters at its May 2007 commencement. The university cited Mary Lou for her energetic, untiring work as Executive Director of the Thea Bowman Foundation.

Charlene



Charlene Smith, FSPA

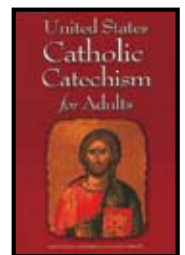
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Thea as a toddler



Enjoying a delightful fundraiser!
Top: Thea Scholar "Wolfie" Stervil.
Middle: Jacob Oliver Jennings, youngest Friend of Thea.
Bottom: Wynton Marsalis, Charlene Smith, and
Dr. Leonard Jennings. (Photos: George Jennings)



Thea Inspiration in Brooklyn

(Editor's Note: This is a version of Enid McCoy-Krieger's presentation about Thea at her church near Charlottesville, Virginia, for Black History Month. Enid speaks from her heart about the "characteristics of a very fine woman." Her talk is modified and used with permission.)



Photo: Courtesy of Enid McCoy-Krieger

America routinely celebrates known great black Americans—like Martin Luther King, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth. But there are so many other African Americans equally deserving of attention. Sister Thea Bowman is one of them.

When I took over as CEO of St. Mary's Hospital, I quickly learned that the people of Brooklyn—whether Jewish, Protestant, Christian, Muslim, black, white, or Hispanic—shared a deep love and respect for Sister Thea from her work at an outreach ministry called Solid Ground.

Thea died before I arrived at the hospital, but shortly after my arrival, I was introduced to her spirit. I was greeted each morning by this lovely Marshall

in Brooklyn and throughout the world's Catholic community. She was a teacher and a mentor, as well as a wonderful singer and dancer. Many people embraced her as a philosopher and beloved friend. Community members told me countless stories of how she had walked the streets of not only Brooklyn, but Mississippi, Louisiana, Chicago, Alabama, and Michigan fighting prejudice, hatred, and other barriers that separate people. I came to believe that in many instances, it was her spirit that supported my efforts and influenced my day-to-day decisions.

A granddaughter of slaves, Thea was the first black Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, a religious community of diversity, united by their relationships and sisterhood with each other.

Thea spoke out against anything that she viewed as a negative in the church, especially the undervaluing of African Americans and women in the church and in society. She was so good at speaking out that the bishop of the Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi, appointed her as the Consultant for Intercultural Awareness. In this role, she gave presentations across the U.S. and in countries around the world.

Her gatherings were always exciting—with singing, prayer, gospel preaching, and storytelling—all in keeping with her goal to create a world community without walls. Once, when she appeared on *Sixty Minutes*, even Mike Wallace was clapping and experiencing her joy.



Courtesy: FSPA Thea Bowman Collection. Artist: Michael Bouldin.

Bouldin portrait of her that the staff had given to me. I was secretly pleased and strengthened when staff compared me to her, especially when I reached out and cared for others.

Sister Thea was a life force

Thea was quoted as saying: "Sometimes people think they have to do big things in order to make change, but if each one of us would light a candle, we'd have a tremendous light." Those who knew her continue to bask in her tremendous light.

In 1984, Thea was diagnosed with breast cancer. The year before her death in 1990, she was invited to be the keynote speaker at the National Bishops Conference. It must have been a tremendous sight to see hundreds of Catholic bishops, all men, sing, "We Shall Overcome" with her.

The hundreds of testaments to her life and work demonstrate the impact she had. There are schools and clinics named after her, including the **Sister Thea Bowman Family Health Center** opened by St. Mary's Hospital in 1996. She helped found the popular **Institute for Black Catholic Studies** at Xavier University, New Orleans. Every summer this institute trains pastoral workers and clergy for ministry in African American communities.

In an article written about Thea, there is a quote from Sister Charlene Smith (who entered the convent with Thea, went to college with her, and who is coordinator of the Thea Bowman Legacy): "People who knew Thea know that she is already a saint." I agree with her, and I hope you will, too. •



Enid B. McCoy-Krieger

Enid, a registered nurse, spent more than 38 years in health care in New York City. In 1994, she retired from her position at the health department. Although she had planned a permanent retirement, the Catholic Medical Center of Brooklyn and Queens, Inc. recruited her to be the Executive Director of St. Mary's Hospital of Brooklyn.

*Following five very challenging but rewarding years, during which she spearheaded the opening of The Pierre Toussaint Family Health Center and the **Sister Thea Bowman Family Health Center**, she retired for the second time and moved with her husband to Earlsville, Virginia.*



Camp "Angels" Prepare Thea Bowman Upper

by Mary Queen Donnelly

Mark Twain had it right about most things, but he sure missed when it came to the youth working in the Catholic Heart Workcamp in the summer of 2007. If "youth is wasted on the young," you'll have a hard time proving it among the 200 plus young folks who descended on work stations in the Metro Jackson, Mississippi area, to help those in need.

The Heart Workcamp started ten years ago in Florida with 100 campers under the direction of Steve and Lisa Walker. The program has grown to include more than 8,000 campers in 33 cities across the country and in Jamaica.

"The week of service in the Metro Jackson area included projects in Jackson, Canton, Madison, and Clinton," said Ann Cook, Senior High Youth Director at Saint

Richard Catholic Church and Camp Manager for the Metro Jackson area camp.

"Nineteen organizations benefited from the free labor provided by these young people," said Cook. "They painted, hauled

but we hosted our first camp last year."

This summer, the camp volunteers were hosted at St. Joseph Catholic High School in Madison, thanks to Principal Bill Heller. They slept, ate, and prayed there.

"Hopefully, the Jackson area will continue to be a host site for many years to come," said Rizor. "The community benefits a great deal from the labor put in by these kids, but I really do think one of the great benefits is the realization on the part of young people. They leave with a greater appreciation of their personal blessings and a real knowledge that they can make a difference."

"I had heard that Heart Camp is a life changing experience," said 15-year old Morgan Beck, a first time camper from St. Phillip's Parish in Tennessee, who worked on the renovation of Sister Thea Bowman's home on Hill Street in Canton. "It is hot and hard work, but I have never felt so great about a project."

Morgan was joined by five other volunteers on the Bowman house project: Mary Stafford Hill, 14-year-old first timer from St. Richard's Parish; Ethan Leisinger, 16, from St. Philip's; Nathan School, 15, from St. Francis in Madison; Kristina Steinke, 26-year-old young adult from St. Philip's; and Emily Wilson, age 15 from St. Philip's.

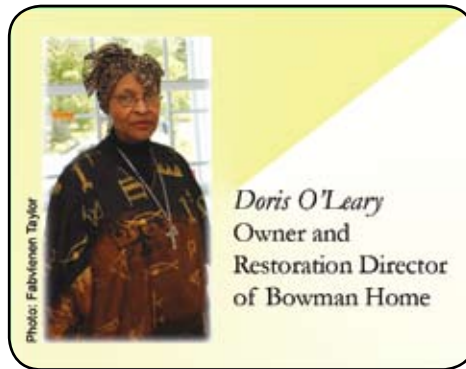
"I have attended the Heart Camp for the past three years," said Emily Wilson. "This one is the best. Everyone is so friendly and joyous. We are just on fire for God."

The Heart Camp volunteers who worked on the Bowman home were joined by the 73-year-old

off trash, refinished damaged sidewalks, reclaimed overgrown areas of playgrounds, made repairs to residences, and worked in daycare centers."

Hosting the Catholic Heart Workcamp in the greater Jackson area is the fruition of a dream three years in the making for Amelia Rizor, Junior High Youth Director at Saint Richard Catholic Church and Facilities Director for the camp.

"After attending my first camp in Nashville with the kids from St. Richard's, I knew it would be awesome to bring the camp to our area," said Rizor. "It took a lot of prayer, coordination, and plain old hard work,



Persons interested in helping with the restoration and preservation of Sister Thea Bowman's home can call Doris O'Leary at 601.859.4491.

the Sister Room

owner of the house, Mrs. Doris O'Leary, who purchased the house in 2007 and plans to convert the home to a "shelter for young folks" who are having difficulty reading and writing and learning skills in general to survive in life.

"As hot as it was, Mrs. O'Leary was right out there with the rest of us," said Kristina Steinke. "SHE was an inspiration unto herself. She kept US going."

O'Leary called the volunteers her ANGELS "with capital letters through and through."

"Those kids would get here early in the morning, pile out the vehicle, and the first thing they would do is pray—right out there on the front lawn!" said O'Leary. "The neighbors must have wondered what was going on—these white kids on the front lawn of 136 Hill Street in Canton praying and singing and working on this old lady's house."

"Talk about an inspiration. No telling how many bags of debris and bricks and junk those kids hauled off from this house. And never a complaint among them. I'm telling you, they are angels," she said.

Mrs. O'Leary purchased the Bowman house when she moved back to Canton, Mississippi, from California. A contemporary of Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA, who



Angels at Bowman house front door

died of cancer in 1990, O'Leary has fond personal memories of the Bowman home.

"When I was a teenager, our house burned, and since Dr. Bowman, a physician, and Mrs. Bowman had only one child, Thea, and I was 14 of 16 children, they didn't give a second thought about taking me in," said O'Leary. "So I literally grew up with Thea until she joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Wisconsin at age 15. I called Mrs. Bowman 'Mama Bowman.'"

As far as Doris O'Leary is concerned, it is payback time. Just as the Bowman's offered her shelter as a teenager, giving her far more than a roof over her head, she plans to offer the same to young teens who are desperately in need of shelter: physically, educationally, and spiritually.

"I plan to call the home The Sister Thea Bowman Upper Room," said O'Leary. "I have always loved that scene of Jesus instructing and guiding his disciples in the upper room before his death."

O'Leary had a similar project in California, called the Upper Room where she provided instruction and tutoring to young people in need of guidance. The Sister Thea Upper Room

will be structured in the spirit of Sister Thea Bowman who always preached "as you climb the ladder of success, reach back and help someone."

"With the help of my angels from the Catholic Heart Work Camp, we've got a jumpstart," said O'Leary. "My granddaughter, Angela Maria O'Leary, is already tutoring here. She is a student at Grambling State University in Louisiana, but this summer [2007] she is with me helping to get the project started."

All three members of the Bowman family died and were buried from the Bowman home in Canton: Sister Thea's parents Mrs. Bowman and Dr. Theon Bowman. Finally, Sister Thea Bowman passed on herself under the same roof of her family home.

O'Leary said, "This house is full of ghosts, but they are Holy Ghosts!" •



Mary Queen Donnelly

A Canton, Mississippi, native, Mary Queen again crossed paths with Thea while covering a lecture series. Sister Thea was presenting at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans. After Thea's death, Donnelly wrote a memorial in her honor for America magazine.

I had heard that Heart Camp is a life-changing experience. It's hot and hard work, but I have never felt so great about a project.
Morgan Beck
First time camper



Photos of Doris' wonderful angels by Jeff Cook, of Metro Christian Living, Jackson, Mississippi.

Thea Notes . . .

New D.C. Charter School Named after Thea

In June 2007, the Washington, D.C. Charter School Board approved six new charter schools, one of which is the [Thea Bowman Preparatory](#), a middle school. Each school has to meet a range of academic and other conditions before the board will approve opening in fall 2008. Thea's school did.

Thea was chosen as the inspiration for this school because of "her lifelong dedication to educating people of all backgrounds. The mission of Thea Bowman Preparatory Academy Public Charter School is *"to educate middle school age students with a developmentally appropriate, rigorous, standards-based curriculum that fosters a culture of self-discipline, service, and intellectual development so that these students will enter and complete a challenging high school program and value a post-secondary education."*

Middle school students in the District of Columbia are in crisis. In 2005, eighth grade students in the District of Columbia scored worse in



Former Catholic school may be home to new academy.
(Photo: Courtesy of Mark Cosenza, school founder)

reading and math than 51 of the 52 jurisdictions tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).



Tell us your Thea news:

Thea News

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Legacy Inspires a Singer



Photo: Courtesy of Daphne DeMills

Daphne DeMills

In 1985, Daphne DeMills attended a church revival in Springfield Gardens, New York. Little did she know then that hearing and meeting Thea would have such a long-standing impact on her life. As Daphne recalls, "As she preached and sang, I remember thinking she was speaking to me."

During her encounter with Bowman, she felt a spiritual connection, a connection that she did not fully understand until years later. One day, in 1992, when Sister Thea and her death were on her mind, DeMills found herself bursting into tears and then into song. Healing of some kind came over her "through Sister Thea."

Daphne asked Thea to help her, and the following songs were created: "Where You Lead Me Lord," "Woman at the Well," "I Found Jesus," and "Everything Will Be Alright." It also came to Daphne "that the connection with Sister Thea was in some way meant to continue a part of her work of evangelization. This I knew because the mandate in the 'Woman at the Well' said: 'I'm gonna send you into the world and I want you tell everybody 'bout yourself and when you tell everybody 'bout yourself, you're gonna win souls for me.'"

As time went on, Daphne created enough songs to have a CD produced. It will be available later in 2008.



Mary Pat Hill, OSM

Mary Pat, a Servant of Mary of Ladysmith, Wisconsin, is Managing Editor of Thea News.

Her ministry includes computer assistance, social justice projects, and <hillconnections.org>, linking faith with action.

Film Project Honored Thea

In October 2007, [Boston College](#) film graduates Nelliana Kuh and James Zehn visited La Crosse to learn about Thea from people who knew her. They also filmed Thea artifacts in Thea House and in the Heritage Department Thea Collection for their project.

Kuh and Zehn made a documentary about Sister Thea for a tribute event at Boston College held in her honor in late November 2007. It was Thea's teachings and life that helped shape Kuh during her years at Boston College.



Courtesy of David Csicsko

Sacred Visions in Art and Design

Sister Thea Bowman and Rosa Parks stood side by side in mailings sent by artist [David Lee Csicsko](#) to announce his *Sacred Visions in Art and Design* exhibition. It ran from June 16-August 27, 2007, at Loyola University in Chicago.

His life-size stained-glass Thea is in St. Benedict the African Church on Chicago's south side. Csicsko designed four windows: Thea, Rosa Parks, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman. ●

“Pilgrimage to Thea-land” continued from page 1

From there, we journeyed to Mississippi where we had a time set to meet with Sister Dorothy Ann Kunding. Sister Dorothy lived with Sister Thea in her last years. I was anticipating seeing her because I recalled her from the video we have of the 1989 visit with the youth.

Sister Dorothy shared different stories and pictures of Sister Thea. It was obvious that Sister Dorothy had a great love for Sister Thea. She shared a small gift—a cup that was used at Sister Thea’s bed stand—with “Thea M.” Then Sister Dorothy showed us around Canton. First we went to see Father Joe Dyer, pastor of the local parishes. Father Joe also shared stories of his time with Sister Thea. It was good for Thea M. to hear from these two people who knew so much of Sister Thea. What a gift!

From there Sister Dorothy took us over to the Bowman house where Mrs. Doris O’Leary, old friend of

the Bowman family, was in the middle of renovations. Mrs. O’Leary moved back from California after many years and purchased the Bowman house. I remembered this house since this is where I had the opportunity to meet Sister Thea. I remembered the different rooms. When we met Sister Thea, we gathered in her bedroom so she could be in her bed for more comfort. Mrs. O’Leary was renovating the place so she could create “The Thea Bowman Upper Room,” a place for after school and summer tutoring of children who need extra help. She had already begun meeting with young people.

Thea M. was quite taken in by this whole adventure of meeting people who knew Sister Thea personally, going to her homestead, and walking in the rooms that were filled with Sister Thea’s presence. Thea expressed her desire to go back in the summer to help at The Thea Bowman Upper Room. •



Linda Manternach
Linda and her husband Dean have four children: Thea, Sophia, Grace, and Micah. She is Director of the Family Life Office of the Archdiocese of Dubuque. This small community calls her “to be the best and most that I can be.”

“Soul Corner” Cartoon Features Thea

Morrie Turner’s “Soul Corner” cartoon, featuring Thea, was published on Mother’s Day, May 13, 2007. “Soul Corner” is part of “Wee Pals”—the cartoon strip that “opened doors” for Turner. “Wee Pals” has been syndicated for more than 30 years and appears in 1,110 newspapers internationally, including the *Oakland Tribune*.

Turner began drawing caricatures in the fifth grade. In high school, he expanded to

creating cartoons. He joined the Army Air Force following high school graduation, and while on guard duty, he drew cartoons.

Following the war, he created community affairs publications for the Oakland Police Department while freelancing cartoons to national publications. *Baker’s Helper*, a bakery industry publication, was the first to buy one of his cartoons for \$5.00.

With no formal art training,

Turner sought the advice and encouragement of other professional cartoonists. When he began questioning why there were no minorities in cartoons, his mentor, Charles Schultz of Peanuts fame, suggested he create one.

In the early 1960s he created a series, Dinky Fellas, that evolved into Wee Pals, a world without prejudice celebrating ethnic differences. In 1965, the series became the first multi-ethnic cartoon syndicated in the United States. •



Morrie Turner’s cartoon version of himself.



Thea Resources Are Readily Available

Learn more about Thea.
Share her inspiring story with others.



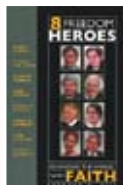
Art

Sister Thea Bowman Series by Michael O'Neill McGrath. Five paintings inspired by the life of Thea. Pictured at right: "Every Time I Feel the Spirit" poster (20"x26"). Bee Still Studio; beestill@aol.com; 215.836.0343.



Books

8 Freedom Heroes: Changing the World with Faith by Brennan R. Hill. Chapter Four: "Thea Bowman: Freedom From Prejudice." St. Anthony Messenger Press; \$17.95; search.americancatholic.org; 800.488.0488.



Looking Back to Move Ahead: An Experience of History, A Journey of Hope by Fronzie Brown-Wright, a best selling Canton, Mississippi, author. Thea, a friend from childhood, remembered as inspirational. FBW & Associates, Inc.; \$15.00; 937.855.7120.



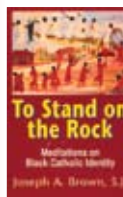
Saints to Lean On: Spiritual Companions for Illness and Disability by Janice McCrane, SSJ. "Thea: Our Companion in Joy-Filled Suffering." St. Anthony Messenger Press; \$13.95; search.americancatholic.org; 800.488.0488.



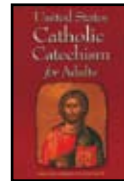
Sister Thea Bowman Shooting Star edited by Celestine Cepress, FSPA, and with a forward by Mike Wallace. Includes selected writings and speeches of Thea's. Viterbo University Bookstore; \$9.95. 800.482.8398.



To Stand on the Rock: Meditations on Black Catholic Identity by Joseph A. Brown, SJ. Orbis Books; \$15.00; maryknoll.org/mall/orbis/pricex.htm; 914.941.7636 Ext. 2576 or 2477.



United States Catholic Catechism for Adults by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops; \$24.95; USCCBpublishing.org; paperback and CD-audio; 800.235.8722.



Women Saints: 365 Daily Devotions and Prayers by Madonna Sophia Compton. Thea is featured on March 30. Crossroad Publishing Co.; \$13.97; store.cpcbooks.com; 212.868.1801.



Icon

Thea, Joyous Troubadour of God by Maryam Gossling, FSPA. Greeting cards, \$1.00 each; 11"x14" posters, \$15.00; 4"x5" plaques, \$12.50; 11"x14" plaques, \$25.00. Add \$3.50 for shipping and handling for orders up to \$15.00; \$4.50 for larger orders. Send to Maryam Gossling, 2733 Lindale Avenue NE, Cedar Rapids, IA 52402; e-mail gosslingmaryam@mcleodusa.net or call 319.360.2559.



Videos

Almost Home: Living with Suffering and Dying. A Gabriel Award, Wilbur Award, and Silver Angel Award winning video, it shares Thea's own words about her personal experience of living with a terminal illness. Liguori Publications; 30 minutes; \$39.95; www.liguori.org; 800.325.9521.



Sr. Thea: Her Own Story. Made shortly before her death, it explores Thea's childhood, religious calling, and aspirations for humanity. It contains interviews with Thea and her friends. Oblate Media and Communications; 54 minutes; VHS or DVD; \$19.99; www.videoswithvalues.org; 800.233.4629.



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