

FSPA to celebrate life of Sister Thea Bowman

Events to coincide with 25th anniversary of revered sister's death



Courtesy of Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

This portrait of Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA, painted by Tony Bryant is among the art that will be displayed as part of *Thea Bowman: Life and Legacy on Display*, which will showcase art and artifacts illustrating Sister Thea's effect on the world during and after her life.

BY JANE COMEAU

LA CROSSE – Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA (1937-1990), is revered by many as a significant figure in modern Catholicism having dedicated her life working for the black community. During her life, and primarily in the years after the peak of the civil rights movement carrying on the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., Sister Thea, a black woman, worked with people of all races to help them see their own lives in a new light.

La Crosse resident, Charlene Smith, FSPA, was a friend of Sister Thea's for 35 years – they entered St. Rose Convent together. In her book, "Thea's Song, The Life of Thea Bowman," Sister Charlene takes readers back to Sister Thea's first mission assignment in 1959: teaching grades five and six at Blessed Sacrament Elementary School in La Crosse. "She sought to build a partnership between Holy Child Jesus Mission School, her school in Canton, Mississippi, with its black students, and her white Catholic Blessed Sacrament students," Sister Charlene wrote. "Through letters about each

other's worlds with pictures, stories, and songs, a happy relationship developed."

Sister Charlene also notes in her book, "Children claimed it a badge of honor to be a student in Sister Thea's classroom."

Sister Thea's teaching connection in La Crosse extends to Viterbo College, now Viterbo University. According to "Thea's Song," "At Viterbo, her reputation as a stellar student, a distinguished scholar, a performance artist, and a much-loved and admired authority on black literature ... was solid."

The FSPA and the Franciscan Spirituality Center recognize the many ways in which Sister Thea's spirit continues to move people to find their deepest humanity. Her influence is profound today, with six schools, a center for women and a foundation bearing her name and all seeking to educate and advance humanity of all backgrounds.

To mark the 25th anniversary of her death following a courageous battle with breast cancer, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the Franciscan Spirituality Center

will host a series of events to celebrate her profound influence.

Thea Bowman: Life and Legacy on Display: March 17-30, Franciscan Spirituality Center, La Crosse – Art and artifacts, including art by Brother Mickey McGrath, which illustrate Sister Thea's effect on the world during and after her life will be showcased.

Gallery hours are scheduled and private showings are available.

Friends of Thea: Sharing the Joy: March 29, 2-4 p.m., Franciscan Spirituality Center – FSPA invites everyone to a panel discussion focused on Sister Thea's legacy as it continues today. Panelists include author and evangelist Father Maurice Nutt, artist and writer Brother Mickey McGrath,

fellow Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration Marla Lang and Thea Foundation's Mary Lou Jennings. Space is limited and pre-registration is required.

Mass recognizing Sister Thea's death: March 30, 10:30 a.m., Mary of the Angels Chapel, St. Rose Convent, La Crosse. Presider and homilist Father Maurice Nutt will be joined by the Viterbo University concert choir for Mass. For friends of Sister Thea unable to attend, Mass will stream live on the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration's website, www.fspa.org.

All event details and registration information is available at www.fspa.org/theabowman.

Editor's note: Jane Comeau is communications director for the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.

"I think the difference between me and some people is that I'm content to do my little bit. Sometimes people think they have to do big things in order to make changes. But if each one would light a candle we'd have a tremendous light."

~ Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A.

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