



DAY 2

St. Rose and The Shrine



Sister Thea Bowman, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, was declared a Servant of God in June 2018.

Prayer, Witness and Service FSPA celebrates 175 years

PHOTOS COURTESY OF COURTESY OF FSPA

THE FRANCISCAN SISTERS OF PERPETUAL ADORATION (FSPA) AND SERVANT OF GOD SISTER THEA BOWMAN, AN FSPA WHO PASSED AWAY IN 1990, ARE SIGNIFICANT FIGURES IN THE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES. THEY BOTH MADE UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GROWTH AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH. IN 2024, AS THE FSPA CELEBRATES 175 YEARS OF PRAYER, WITNESS AND SERVICE, THEY ARE SHARING THEIR STORIES OF BOTH HISTORICAL AND MODERN LIVES.

History and Foundation

Six Bavarian women, among them Otilie Dirr, later known as Mother Aemiliana Dirr, founded the FSPA in May 1849 in Wisconsin. With Bishop Michael Heiss' invitation and Mother Antonia Herb's guidance, the congregation arrived in La Crosse in 1871.

The story of FSPA begins in Ettenbeuren, Bavaria, which is now a part of modern-day Germany, in the late 1840s. Due to the unrest in German society at that time, a pastor, his associate and 12 lay Franciscans (including five men and seven women) decided to travel to America with the aim of providing Christian education to immigrants. Six of the women in the group desired to start a religious commu-

nity. The group arrived in America in May 1849, and the six women, led by Mother Aemiliana, began living in community near Milwaukee. They later moved to Jefferson, Wis., before finally settling in La Crosse.

The congregation, then and now, follows the Franciscan tradition. Inspired by the teachings of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, the sisters emphasize poverty, humility and service to others. Mother Antonia Herb's vision and 1865 promise were rooted in perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, fostering a continuous practice of prayer.

Mission and Ministry

The FSPA's mission revolves around prayer, community life and active ministry. Perpetual adoration is a distinctive practice that symbolizes the sisters' unceasing commitment to prayer. This devotion has

been core to their spirituality and has defined their identity within the Church.

The mission of the FSPA extends beyond prayer and encompasses a wide range of roles, such as parish workers, volunteers, spiritual directors, nurses, pastoral associates, artists, authors, social justice advocates, educators and more. In 2022, the congregation committed to building relationships that challenge them to be people of encounter who stand with all suffering in our Earth community; to be freed through joyful Gospel living; to be transformed in love and goodness for community and mission; to celebrate authentic unity in diversity by challenging their white privilege; and working toward equity and inclusion of all.

These commitments guide the FSPA's dedication to ecospirituality efforts through the lens of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*. They aim to respect

the sacred dignity of every person and work towards immigration reform. The organization also strives to become an anti-racist entity and engage in the work of truth and healing regarding its past. Specifically, the FSPA is committed to addressing its history of administering a Native American boarding school from 1883 to 1969 on the Bad River Reservation in Odanah, Wis.

Expansion and Impact

Over the years, the FSPA have expanded their social presence and impact. The congregation's ministries have evolved to address the changing needs of the world. They have founded schools, including Viterbo University in La Crosse, and hospitals, including Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse and Sparta, and St. Anthony Regional Hospital in Carroll, Iowa. Additionally, they have engaged in social justice

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In 1988, Sister Bowman visited Africa to teach a seminar on racism. Sick at the time, her vibrant spirit came alive during her time in Nigeria and Tanzania.



Pictured at top left is Mother Aemiliana Dirr and above is St. Rose Convent, circa 1871.

initiatives, and all partners in mission, including affiliates, prayer partners, staff and collaborators, have adapted to fulfill their mission in diverse ways. The FSPA's influence extends beyond Wisconsin, reaching communities across the United States and beyond.

Spirituality and Values

The FSPA's spirituality is deeply rooted in Franciscan values. Poverty, simplicity and reverence for creation are integral to their way of life. The sisters strive to embody the spirit of St. Francis, emphasizing love for all of God's creation. This Franciscan spirit, or charism, shapes their approach to prayer, community and service, fostering a holistic and compassionate lifestyle. The sisters founded three spirituality centers in La Crosse, Arbor Vitae, Wis., and Hiawatha, Iowa, as a response to people's desire to grow in their relationship with God, creation, others and self. These centers are an expression of the FSPA's call to balance contemplation, ministry and creative ways of living in a community.

“ 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 A CHANGE. BUT, IF EACH ONE WOULD LIGHT A CANDLE, WE'D HAVE A TREMENDOUS LIGHT. ”

- SISTER THEA BOWMAN

Bertha Bowman, later known as Sister Thea Bowman, was born in 1937 in Yazoo City, Miss. She was raised in a Methodist family but converted to Catholicism as a teenager, inspired by her FSPA teachers and the

Church's universality and teachings. In 1963, after entering the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, she professed her final vows. Thea Bowman's journey reflects a convergence of cultures as an African American woman in a predominantly Caucasian religious congregation.

Sister Thea was a distinguished educator and evangelist. She had a doctorate in English and served as a teacher and later as a professor. She was renowned for her dynamic and engaging teaching style and brought cultural sensitivity and enthusiasm to her classrooms. Sister Thea was dedicated to education beyond conventional settings as she sought to bridge cultural gaps and promote mutual understanding.



“THE ANSWER” EUCHARISTIC RALLY

The FSPA is proud to sponsor “the ANSWER” Eucharistic Rally in La Crosse on June 7. Then, on June 8, the sisters will host the Eucharistic Rally pilgrims, Bishop Battersby and guests for a private celebration of both the rally and FSPA's 175th anniversary. Here's how you can join online.

- **FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 2024**
Perpetual Adoration (Online)
To join online, use your smartphone's camera to scan the QR code below.
8 A.M. TO 8 P.M.
- **SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2024**
Perpetual Adoration (Online)
Join online to participate in adoration live from FSPA's Adoration Chapel
8 A.M.-9:45 A.M.
- **MASS (ONLINE)**
Join online for Mass live from FSPA's Mary of the Angels Chapel
10 A.M.



FOR LINKS TO JOIN, scan the QR code or visit fspa.org/content/news-events/175th-anniversary





Sister Thea Bowman became a vocal advocate for cultural awareness and inclusion within the Church. She passionately promoted the integration of African American culture into liturgy, music and religious expression. Sister Thea emphasized the richness of diversity, asserting that it enhances the Church's vitality. Her charismatic presence and infectious joy, often referred to as "Gospel joy," left a profound impact on those she encountered.

Sister Thea faced many physical challenges, including a battle with cancer. Despite her illness, she remained a source of inspiration for others through her resilience and unwavering faith. Her approach to suffering reflected her deep spirituality and trust in God's providence. In 1990, Sister Thea passed away, leaving behind a legacy of cultural inclusivity, joyful evangelization and a fervent love for the Church.

Beatification Process

The Catholic Church has initiated the process of Sister Thea Bowman's beatification to formally recognize her impact and holiness. This acknowledgment is a testament to her exemplary life and contributions to the faith. The beatification process involves an investigation of her life, virtues and any poten-

tial miracles attributed to her intercession. The Diocese of Jackson in Mississippi opened her cause in November 2018. In June 2018, she was declared Servant of God, the first title given to candidates for sainthood whose cause is under investigation.

175 Years of Prayer, Witness and Service

The FSPA and Sister Thea Bowman have significantly shaped the landscape of the Catholic Church in the United States. The FSPA's dedication to perpetual adoration and diverse ministries reflects a commitment to prayer and service. Through her cultural awareness and joyful evangelization, Sister Thea Bowman left an indelible mark on the Church by promoting inclusivity and Gospel joy. The FSPA community embodies the dynamic and evolving nature of Catholicism, enriched by diverse contributions and expressions of faith. †



SISTERHOOD, AFFILIATION AND PRAYER PARTNERSHIP

FSPA welcome women to discern living life as a vowed Catholic sister. The congregation also welcomes people to consider an affiliate relationship. Affiliates live a life that reflects the teachings of Jesus, St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. FSPA also invite prayer partners who commit to regular prayer in person at Mary of the Angels Chapel in La Crosse.

MARY OF THE ANGELS CHAPEL AND ADORATION CHAPEL

Visitors can attend daily Mass and adoration at the Mary of the Angels Chapel and the Adoration Chapel, both located at St. Rose Convent in La Crosse. Guided tours are available on Fridays and Saturdays from April to December.

SPIRITUALITY CENTERS

The impact of these Franciscan centers cannot be easily measured, but they provide space and resources for those who seek meaning, support, and spiritual nourishment.

JUSTICE AND PEACE

FSPA provides numerous opportunities to engage in the important work of social justice, ranging from serving at the border and using FSPA land as a model for community education to establishing an intentional living community in Chicago. The organization is committed to celebrating authentic unity in diversity by challenging white privilege and striving for equity and inclusion for all. This includes the significant task of truth and healing, particularly regarding the congregation's management of St. Mary's Indian Boarding School in Odanah, Wis.

MESSY JESUS BUSINESS

Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration Julia Walsh founded and hosts *Messy Jesus Business*, a blog and podcast that explores the mess of radical discipleship. Follow her at messyjesusbusiness.com



FOR MORE INFORMATION about any of the above, scan the QR code or visit fspa.org/connect.

