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PROBLEMS IN THE CLOISTER

The following August I moved to Our Mother of Perpetual Help Novitiate, on the corner of Lincoln and Mill Street, where I donned the white veil of the novice and began my cloister duties.

The Novitiate was a three-story house where we thirteen novices lived with two superiors. Our white veils distinguished us from the other more experienced sisters who had taken vows (rather than promises) and wore blue veils. The white veils were also a sign to the laity not to speak to us. This novitiate year was supposed to be one of intense silence, prayer, study and tests of character designed to see if we were truly called to the hard life of religious women.

On the main floor, there was a living room, a bathroom and kitchen, the refectory and Mother Superior's bedroom that also served as her office. A large building attached to the garage had been converted into a chapel. Upstairs, there was one, big, dark room with eight bunk beds and open shelves for our few personal belongings. This arrangement made it easy for our superiors to check on us at night and to make sure we kept our things in order. It was customary for superiors to throw someone's things into a pile in the middle of the floor if they were found to be messy or unfolded.

I struggled with anger to see my things dumped one Saturday morning when I had purposely skipped making my bed and folding my clothes. On that day I had been the cook and it was customary for the cook to tidy her things after breakfast while the other nuns did the dishes. I picked up my stuff and put it back, trying to think spiritual thoughts. Later I approached my superior on my knees to ask for penance. Asking for punishment was routine, even if you did not deserve it. It was a life lived for God, and on a spiritual level,

every nun worth her salt welcomed any opportunity to show gratitude for "bearing a cross."

Still, my desire to defend myself, to explain why I did or didn't do something, never quite died. The few times I did offer an excuse, I felt guilty for my lack of humility. Knowing when to speak up or be quiet was one of my most difficult spiritual challenges of that year. It was to become increasingly more difficult in the following months.

During my second cloistered year, a group of new novices moved in, including Marilee who had just received her new name, Sister Marie Marielle. Having her as a sister as well as a friend was truly wonderful. Her presence became problematic for me, though, because, for some reason the superiors began picking on her more than the others. I often felt torn between loyalty to my superiors and loyalty to my dear friend. I honestly never saw her do anything disrespectful or disobedient and the cruelty directed toward her and a few others was a mystery to me.

As spring began, the cruel penances came to Marielle more frequently, and the enforced silence became a bigger challenge. I offered to speak to the superior in her defense, but Marielle would not hear of it.

"Don't say anything, because I can do this for God," she said.

She was made to drag her tongue on the floor from the back of the chapel to the front before morning prayers. Any of us making a holy hour between five and six a.m. would see her there. I would keep my head bent way over, hoping that she would think I didn't see her. This penance lasted about a month, during which none of us was allowed to talk to her.

After the tongue punishment, she was ordered to be on her knees whenever she talked to the other novices. I couldn't bring myself to see her talk to me on her knees. Once, when I was told to ask Sister Marielle if everything was ready for mass, she dropped to her knees as I formed my question. I stopped talking, despite her assurance that it was okay and dropped to my knees to ask my question. Then I went back and reported the answer to the superior.

I witnessed similarly insensitive and cruel, even criminal, treatment of other sisters. Sister Lillian, who had epilepsy, was denied her medicine. My mind's eye can still see the *grand mal* seizure that many of us in the room witnessed, while we all stood by without

offering assistance, twice in the novitiate dorm and once at one of our other convents.

The assistant superior, Sister Mary Hilda, often sent Sister Lillian to the basement, scolding her harshly, "Sister Maria Lillian, go somewhere else and feel sorry for yourself."

Maria Lillian always looked perplexed by these vague commands and would timidly ask, "Sister, where should I go?"

Sister Mary Hilda would then send her to the basement for two to five hours. If this penance was given during dinnertime, Sister Lillian would ask, "Can I bring my dinner down there with me?" The request was usually refused.

"Just get down there!" she'd yell at Sister Lillian, "And stop feeling sorry for yourself."

After dinner, Sister Marielle would hand me a container specially filled with leftovers, saying with her voice and eyes, "This goes you know where."

I'd grab a fork or spoon and make the trip look legitimate by taking something else for the basement freezer. It creeped me out to go down to the basement because it was so dark and isolated. Sister Lillian would peek out from behind the door when she heard footsteps; we'd exchange smiles and I'd give her the food. One of us would return later for the container, wash it, and put it away.

Sister Lillian's seizures continued. The superiors had given strict instructions that we were not to help her, explaining that she was just feeling sorry for herself. We usually just stood there, helpless and confused about how to deal with the situation. Once, however, during a visit to our convent in Rathdrum, the superior there, Sister Mary Clementia, ignored the instructions and began yelling, "My gosh, novices! Shame on you! Where is your love of Christ? How can you just stand there without helping?"

When Sister Lillian stopped writhing and frothing, Sister Clementia helped her to a chair, talking to her softly. I stood there secretly admiring Sister Clementia. She became my hero in that instant. Finally someone had said out loud what I thought was the right and logical thing to do.

It wasn't clear why Sister Lillian, who had taken her final vows, was made to live with the novices. I had great respect for her commitment to God. The superiors, however, did not. They considered her a burden and would say to her, "You're good for

nothing. Maybe if you'd stop feeling sorry for yourself, Our Lady would find some way to use you for souls."

Later, after observing more severe treatment of Sister Lillian and Sister Marielle, I found myself crying in the confessional, describing the cruelties I had witnessed to Fr. Denis Chicoine. I asked him if I had done wrong by helping Sister Lillian. He assured me that it was not a sin to be merciful and kind, as Christ would be. I clung to this encouragement, which I interpreted as permission to keep thinking and questioning. My grandfather, had he known, would have been pleased that I was trying to do the right thing for others.

Through all of this, my sisters constantly edified me with their humble acceptance of their humiliations and penances. Incredibly, I rarely heard anyone grumble or make excuses.

I ended up being a white veil for four years, mainly because of my health. At the end of my third year, I was told I would be taking my vows, but the details of when and where never came from the bishop.

When no word came by December of 1983, my superior asked if I would be willing to offer up this delay as another sacrifice for poor sinners.

"Of course," I told her.

It seemed that irregularity was the norm in this community. I did struggle with the thought that, like St. Therese, I was destined to be a perpetual novice. I wondered if God was trying to tell me that I didn't belong there in the convent after all. In darker moments, I knelt before the tabernacle, fighting tears and praying, "Dear Lord, I don't understand what you are doing, but I trust you." At the same time, I wondered what James was doing.

During all of those four years, we were often reminded that novices should be the pillars of the community, the hidden people behind the scenes who devoted their time to hard work and supporting others in this world of temptation and evil. My superiors used this rationale for signing us up for huge penances. I'd often see my name on a list on the bulletin board for night holy hours. They wanted me to pray in church in the middle of the night, despite the fact that my health was bad and lack of rest could have serious consequences. I used to think that I wouldn't last long without

proper sleep, and I wanted to last as long as I could, to do God's work.

Of course, I knew other nuns whose health was clearly worse than mine, and my heart went out to them. I wished that I could do more to give them some relief. In place of direct assistance, I did more penance.

During common prayers, the superior would say, "If you really loved God, you would extend your arms during the rosary. Souls are going to hell and what are you willing to do about it?" I wanted to be the best nun I could be and save as many souls as possible. This encouragement to do penance resonated with my commitment to imitate Our Savior, who had given his life for me. Sometimes the pain was so intense that I could think of nothing else but letting my arms down. "Oh, my Jesus, it is for love of Thee," I would pray. But, when it became too much to bear, I would fake a cough or blow my nose just for the relief of moving my arms.

Driving to Mount St. Michael's during the frigid winter months offered a special opportunity for penance. The bulky layers of clothing made it difficult to hold my hands up in the mandatory steeple position for any length of time. I would lose circulation in my arms and they would throb until I absolutely had to extend them, if only for a few seconds. I worried that the superior who was driving would catch my lapse in the rear view mirror. We had to mortify our eyes to avoid the dangers of the world. Looking up was taboo, but sometimes I would peek and see the superior watching me. I hated seeing her glare at me.

We often waited into the middle of the night for the bishop to perform some ceremony. We'd sleep on the floor until he arrived. There was usually no food for us, so we'd fall asleep hungry. We novices noticed that the superiors got good food and the best places to rest, but no one complained except Sister Joan, whom I secretly admired for her open rebellion. After initially rejoicing over her assertiveness, however, I'd struggle with my conscience, convinced that I was being disrespectful.

Sometimes Sister Joan would defiantly stomp down the stairs of the Novitiate on her way to holy hour in the middle of the night. A supervisor or assistant would be waiting at the bottom step to surprise her with a whack across the face. I witnessed this a few times

when coming back from the bathroom. I felt sorry for her. Then I felt guilty for feeling sorry for her. In confession, I usually summed it up by saying that I had “unkind thoughts about my superiors.”

That winter, I started seeing specks in front of my eyes, like one does before she passes out. I was chronically tired, my body would shake, and my heart was racing all the time. Under Schuckardt's leadership, our physical problems were usually attributed to “being in the head,” so lots of the sisters' real health issues were overlooked. At the time I did not see the irony of this as far as the bishop's health problems were concerned.

During my mom's Christmas visit, I told her about my symptoms. She called my superior and offered to take me to a doctor. Instead, the superior allowed the mother of one of the nuns, who was a nurse, to come into the cloister to see me. She took some blood and gave me a glucose stress test. Her diagnosis was that I was pre-diabetic and had a thyroid problem. I found out later that my parents had paid for health insurance for me through those years because of our family history of diabetes, insurance that I was prevented from enjoying.

I was put on a strict diet with an emphasis on sufficient protein. That posed a challenge since the donations and salvaged food we relied on were primarily carbohydrates. Nevertheless, Sister Superior Flora was very accommodating and encouraged me to eat properly. I was allowed to forage through the cupboards for protein items.

Once, when Sister Flora was sick, Sister Superior Hilda took over and came unglued when she saw me put two tablespoons of peanut butter into my oatmeal. “Sister Mary Redempta is full of self pity,” she clipped.

I hit the floor as a sign of submission as was the custom. Now, in addition to being hungry, I was embarrassed and confused. I wondered if I was being tested or if Sister Hilda was crazy. After stressing over it for a few minutes, I let it go. She'd soon be yelling at somebody else. We novices continually got mixed messages from our superiors.

The main question on my mind was whether my illness would prevent me from taking my vows. I almost hadn't made it into the program because of my ulcer and, now, this. I wasn't sure if a novice could stick around if she was sick. I asked Sister Flora about it. She

was often sick, herself, and very emotional. It was rumored that she had visions and she often referred to messages from Our Lady. She told me that I could still be a nun, that I was just being tested, and that she thought Our Blessed Mother had special plans for me.

As I knelt there reflecting on her words, she added, "Anyone who was in on that special grace for our bishop at St. Mary Major in Rome...."

I must have looked perplexed because she quickly added, "Of course you know what happened to His Excellency in Rome?"

I didn't say anything and she gazed at me intently, her big brown eyes opening wide. "He became our Holy Father!"

How could I have missed this? Apparently an apparition of Our Lady had mystically crowned Bishop Schuckardt in Rome, and now he was the pope. I had not noticed the slightest sign of excitement among our travel group about this momentous event. Though this seemed like a very big deal, it was being kept secret for some reason. Sister Flora confided that only certain religious knew about this, but she didn't tell me who they were.

After that, whenever I saw the bishop, I'd look long and hard at him, but I simply could not wrap my mind around what Sister Flora had told me.

One day it was announced that Sister Mary Ludmilla had chosen a new name for herself. We were to call her "Sister Ludmilla Konrada Maria." I remembered that she was the one who had shaved the girls' heads at summer camp. Now I learned that she was a superior at our Rathdrum convent and principal of the grade school. I remember thinking, *Wow. She really wants to have a name like the bishop's.* I wondered if this name change had anything to do with her belief that Francis Konrad Maria Schuckardt was now the real pope.

I had been looking forward to saying my vows and getting a blue veil in September, but I was told I would have to wait yet another year. My health had improved, but I was still pre-diabetic, and there were some concerns about my recovery. While the others were running schools, going on mission circuits, giving talks and doing other public tasks, I remained in the cloister and spent my time in the cellar monitoring our emergency food supply for mice and worms.

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ENEMIES MULTIPLY

Because I was considered a little less vulnerable to the dangers beyond our cloister, since I had already completed my required year, I sometimes had to accompany the superior to a big, white mansion at the end of the street, where “rebellious sisters” resided.

I especially hated these visits in which I was forced to witness the humiliation of sisters whom I liked and admired. For some reason, the superiors had determined that this group of young women needed more discipline and reformation than the rest of the sisters. The ones who lived in this house, named after Our Lady of Sorrows (of Bornhofen, Germany), were given harsh penances and required to spend long periods in silence. Although they had all demonstrated their commitment by taking their final vows, they were publicly humiliated and privately subjected to abusive physical punishments. I once saw a friend from high school prostrate on the dirty kitchen floor, her arms outstretched, while the other nuns walked over her. More than once, I heard the sounds of flagellation going on behind closed doors. It was not unusual to see a superior deliver a slap across a nun’s face.

Though I was never physically abused, those four white veil years in the cloister severely tested my patience and perseverance. I wondered if this harsh way of life was responsible for the decline in health I began to experience. The emotional toll of living under intense pressure and physical hardships was affecting my body and mind, probably in more ways than I could understand at the time. Again I wondered if God was telling me that it wasn’t right for me to be there. More difficult than my own sleep and food deprivation was having to watch my sisters being verbally condemned and severely

mistreated, both physically and psychologically. There was little I could do to help them.

When the bishop announced a seminar in San Diego, which the novices would be allowed to attend, all of us in the cloister were thrilled. The bishop and his entourage would be making this apostolic journey to lecture about the Fatima secrets and to encourage people to join the Crusade.

He told the superiors that any religious with relatives in San Diego should ask their parents for money to fund the trip and the seminar at a hotel. I called my parents to ask if they could help out. They were excited that my brother and sister, who still lived in the San Diego area, would have a chance to meet the bishop and priests. They agreed to provide my superiors with whatever funds were needed to get me there. I was very thankful for the opportunity to leave the cloister and travel to California.

I could never have imagined how our joyful anticipation would turn into utter misery. We had little food or sleep and were in a constant state of confusion about what was going to happen next. The first night, we were not assigned rooms until one a.m., and I was given a place on the floor of the hotel room. When it was time to eat, I got into a van with one of the nuns and begged for food at restaurants. We needed to feed fifteen people from these begging trips. I couldn't help but wonder how the funds my parents had donated for this trip were being used.

I never did see my brother and sister. Each time I asked if I could call them, the superior would tell me to be patient. "Our Lady will let us know if it's God's will that you see your family." When she yelled at me for being too attached to the things of this world—that is, my family—I quit asking.

This was confusing to me because we had been told that the main purpose of the trip was to help our families learn the truth. I was also baffled that this superior, who seemed now to despise me, was Sister Mary Pelagia, the ever-smiling nun whom I had grown to love and respect.

I was glad to be back in the cloister a week later when the trip ended. I was exhausted but I put on a happy face for Sister Flora when she excitedly asked me what it was like to be "Our Lady's Missionary."

My reply was short but honest, "It was very grace-filled."

Our group's travel schedule didn't draw much attention in the United States. But when the bishop and his entourage visited New Zealand, they were scrutinized by the press with an eagle eye.

News reports revealed that the bishop had neglected to pay long distance phone charges, hotel tabs and rental car fees. Other business owners said they had been tricked into giving the group free food and services in response to pleas of poverty, only to discover that Schuckardt had stayed in a plush hotel for the duration of his visit.⁴⁰

The bishop told the *Auckland Star* that it was all a misunderstanding. "In the U.S.," he explained, "It is customary for religious people to beg for food and accommodations. I have discovered that it is not customary in New Zealand."

He said the bills would be paid. Then he announced to us that this bad publicity had been generated by the local Catholic Church to discredit the Tridentines.

Meanwhile, Father Bill Wassmuth of St. Pius X Church in Coeur d'Alene had decided to form the Cult Awareness Center to address disturbing information about the Tridentines that had been disclosed from former members. Fr. Wassmuth had provided counseling to an ex-member suffering emotional trauma from his experience with TLRC and, eventually, had spoken with other former members about their involvement. Wassmuth concluded that the public should be aware of what was really going on with the sect.⁴¹

By the following May, the Cult Awareness Center had conducted numerous interviews with former members and had collected affidavits that portrayed TLRC as a destructive cult. Specifically, the Center had documented the deceptive recruiting and financial practices of TLRC, as well as the use of behavior modification techniques it had used to gain control of its members.⁴²

When Father Wassmuth became aware of the bishop's trip to New Zealand, he contacted the Archbishop of Wellington to alert him. The archbishop responded that the group had left a negative impression and that their recruitment efforts were ineffective.⁴³

At the time, I was not aware of any of this, having no access to news media.

When I heard that my friend, Jackie, was getting married, I was thrilled for her. Cloistered novices were not permitted to go to weddings but, for some reason, my superiors made an exception and allowed me to go to the reception. Perhaps they figured it was time to have a little mercy on me; after all, I was in my fourth year of "training."

My brother Patrick also attended and quickly pulled me aside. "Have you heard? The media is attacking our community again."

"What?" I recalled that earlier that summer my superior had announced that more prayers and sacrifices were needed because the devil was working overtime to destroy Our Lady's community.

"They're saying that the bishop has moral problems," Patrick said softly, taking advantage of the few moments we had alone.

"What do you mean?" I asked, feeling guilty about my sinful curiosity.

"They're saying he is on drugs and that he is a homosexual and harming young boys."

I was shocked. It was my first exposure to this kind of news. Yet, as was typical, we concluded, "See, this is what happens to those who are faithful to the cross."

That Christmas the plan was to go to Mount St. Michael's for Midnight mass. The bishop sent his aides to announce that he would be late due to illness and that we were to go to bed and wait for the call to leave for the Mount.

When the bell finally rang, we scurried around, grabbing our bags and coats, and piled into the van. It was then discovered that Sister Diana was not in the van. I was trusted to go back in and find her. We were living in a constant state of urgency and, on this night, if we ran late, we risked disrupting the bishop's planned mass.

I stepped inside and called, "Sister Diana!" but I didn't see or hear her. I climbed upstairs calling her name.

There was a small scrap of paper on her bed along with her veil. It read, "I'm really sorry. I can't stay here any longer. I love you guys. I love you very much. Sister Diana."

I recall that my prominent thought at the time was thinking, "Oh my gosh, she walked out without a head covering.... how embarrassing."

I dashed down the dorm stairs and out to the van, handing the note to Sister Maria Flora as I climbed in. As usual, everyone was silent in the van. That day, the silence was welcomed more than

usual. I was shocked and sad. Not a word was said about Sister Diana that night. I knew better than to ask any questions about a potential enemy, and Sister Diana would soon become just that to the rest of us.

The next day, Sister Flora announced, "Sr. Diana has fallen from grace. She went back to her family. Take this as a lesson that you and all religious must be very detached from the love of family; otherwise, it will eventually bring you down, as it did for Sister Diana."

I felt torn and sorry for Sister Diana and wondered about her reasons for leaving. I had never seen her do anything to indicate a lack of love for her vocation and convent life. How could the superiors conclude that she loved her family more than God? I feared dwelling on those questions for long, not wanting to risk displeasing God by being critical of my superiors, who, we were often told, were God's special representatives.

Announcements were frequently made about people who had fallen away from TRLC. I'd be working in the garden, laundry or kitchen, and the bell would ring, calling us to the refectory for an announcement. We'd gather there and wait on our knees until Sister Flora or Sister Claudia arrived to tell us who had "fallen from grace." We were admonished to pray for God's mercy. I willingly obeyed, never feeling that I was doing enough for God.

On one such day, the cowbell in the stairway was ringing and ringing until we had all gathered. Someone from the bishop's inner circle came to tell us that Frater Aloysius—one of the Bishop's closest associates—had fallen from grace and left the community. The messenger said, "The devil is going to use him to destroy Our Lady's community."

I was devastated. Frater Aloysius had been one of my favorites. Though we saw the brothers only at big holiday celebrations, he had been very friendly and popular. He and the brothers would perform skits for us. He was very handsome and I had often thought how difficult it must have been for him to give up normal social life to enter the brotherhood.

The next day, on our way to mass, our van stopped for gas. Sister Superior Flora ordered, "No one must look out the window under any circumstances. Fr. Aloysius is out there. You cannot look out the window!"

Though gripped with fear, I desperately wanted to look at him, to see if I could get a clue as to why he left. But I was afraid that, if I did

look, something terrible would happen to me. It would be like betraying Christ to look at the enemy and disobey the command of my superior.

There was more horrible news that year. Fr. Clement Kubish was now publicly rejecting Bishop Schuckardt (Father Clement was an elderly priest from the Midwest who had left his modern parish in the 1970's to help the bishop.⁴⁴ I had grown to love and trust him). It wasn't until later that we were given the reason. At that time all we knew was that Bishop Schuckardt called Fr. Kubish one who had lost grace and become the enemy's tool to destroy us. One of the priests, speaking about both Fr. Kubish and Frater Aloysius told us, "He (referring to Frater Aloysius) was wild and mad. It's clear they are of the devil."⁴⁵

I felt terrible about this news.

Fr. Denis Chicoine stood by the bishop, publicly denying all charges of homosexuality, even to the point of accusing Fr. Kubish of lying.

I later sneaked in a call to Fr. Kubish's home to thank him for helping me over the years. His housekeeper told me that he didn't want to talk to anyone about why he had left.

One day, Sister Flora, announced to us, "We have to pray. The bishop is going to be making a public statement regarding a very serious situation. You have to pray that souls will be saved and that the devil won't get the better end of it."

As I learned later, the situation was that a cult expert and deprogrammer, Father Kent Burtner, had been invited by Fr. Wassmuth and the Cult Awareness Center to give a public lecture at Gonzaga University. In his talk, Fr. Burtner said that information from former members of the Tridentine community revealed a campaign of behavior modification utilizing guilt and other forms of mind control. He provided a number of other shocking statements regarding Bishop Schuckardt, *which* included reports of TLRC members throwing their children out of their homes under threat of excommunication and parents signing liability releases that allowed Tridentine school authorities to apply any form of corporal punishment they deemed necessary. Censorship, deception and guilt discouraged members from asking questions. Group leaders were depriving members of sleep and feeding them protein-deficient diets

to inhibit clear thinking. In other words, artificial conversions were being accomplished through highly orchestrated thought control.⁴⁶

Bishop Schuckardt shot back that, while his group might be idiosyncratic, Fr. Burtner's observations were not legitimate since he had never even set foot on Mount St. Michael.

Fr. Denis, the bishop's right hand man since the founding of the Fatima Crusade in 1967, had been coming to the convent regularly to give talks, say mass, and hear confessions. One day he said, "Sometimes, God allows things to happen in our lives that we don't understand. We must be open in case something comes up that would be hard to accept. For example, if I became ill and couldn't serve you anymore, you would have to find someone else."

I sensed that he was trying to say something important.

Shortly after that, following mass one morning, a priest announced that Fr. Denis was having a nervous breakdown and experiencing doubt and confusion. We were instructed not to listen to him from this point onward, since the devil could be working through him. Fr. Denis had always struck me as a sincere, devout priest. I felt sorry for him.

That August, Bishop Schuckardt was in front of the cameras again, defending us in the media. We were told only the barest outlines of the matter at hand, which now included a court case. The First District Court in Coeur d'Alene had awarded \$1 million to a father who claimed that Bishop Schuckardt and Fr. Chicoine had broken up his family by wrongfully and arbitrarily imposing church doctrine on family members.⁴⁷ The bishop called a press conference to say that the judgment would bankrupt the TLRC and destroy the church.

We prayed a perpetual novena of petition after every mass to win the court case and breathed a sigh of relief when an appeals court reversed the lower court's decision. (In 1985, the father took the case to the Idaho Supreme Court, by which time the bishop had fled.⁴⁸)

Even worse than this case was the charge of a more serious nature which had surfaced the month before. Four young men had broken away from the sect and reported to the media that the bishop had sexually assaulted them while they had been studying for the priesthood. They claimed that Schuckardt, who was often bedridden, would ask them to remove their clothes, disrobe him, and lie down across his body.⁴⁹ Another year would pass before we would be apprised of the details by Father Chicoine. Meanwhile, we prayed on

our knees, our arms stretched out, that the bishop would not be harmed.

Following the summer of rumors, as well as the shock of losing Fr. Kubish and some of the brothers of the bishop's inner circle, we were not too surprised when we were all suddenly commanded to travel by vans to Portland for a training week. Following the recent attacks by the devil against our bishop and community, Schuckardt had decided we needed training in defending our group against these attacks and remaining loyal to TLRC.

I was excited to be traveling again, but I was also full of fear because of the apparent urgency. Was this "the end" after all?

We drove in silence in our white van. The rest of the week I watched the superiors worry about what to do next. Though all orders were supposed to come from the bishop, he hardly ever showed up and didn't seem to be receiving our messages. In Portland, we had to plead for the use of a vacant apartment where we slept on the floor in our sleeping bags. By day, we begged for food.

Between the "classes" urging loyalty to our community, we spent hours in the makeshift hotel chapel, on our knees and holding out our arms as we waited for the bishop to show up. This penance, along with our fasting and poor diet, often made me feel dizzy and lightheaded. I shivered a lot because there was no heat. The bishop appeared only a few times to give us long lectures that included severe reprimands for our lack of the spirit of sacrifice.

1984 was the worst year in terms of delayed ceremonies at Mount St. Michael's. The solemn celebration of the Easter Vigil was delayed for over two weeks so that Bishop Schuckardt could be present. We were always ready, by then, to go anywhere or do anything for the bishop, and we prepared for delays by bringing our overnight bags with us on every trip to Mount St. Michael's. We would continually be called back from the little waiting rooms and then told to go to the chapel to pray that the bishop would have the strength to make it.

On the occasion of the Easter Vigil, I ended up in a room with a blue-veiled sister. After three days of waiting, we finally broke down and made comments to one another.

"This doesn't seem right somehow," I said, and she agreed.

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THE INEVITABLE

In the spring of 1984, my superior called me to her office where she explained that the help was needed in our school in Rathdrum, Idaho. She said that, after four years of training, she felt I was ready to shine in the other convents. Reverend Mother Loyola gave me special permission to leave the cloister to help the active sisters.

"You will make a good teacher," my superior said.

Though surprised and a bit nervous about the task ahead of me, I believed it was the voice of God speaking to me. "Yes, Sister," I replied.

The bonus was getting out of the Novitiate for a few days. I was so tired of seeing the novices being constantly mistreated.

Another bonus of getting assigned to the parish there was its peaceful serene setting. "The City of Mary"—as we called it—was a hundred acre site nestled in the hills on the outskirts of Rathdrum. Evergreen trees surrounded a small assembly of buildings dedicated to the needs of the Fatima Crusaders living in the area. The property overlooked Hayden Lake far below. There was an occasional abandoned whiskey still in the surrounding forest and a small country cemetery where it was easy to believe that its inhabitants were resting in peace. Abandoned building materials and rusted out auto bodies on a neighboring property seemed strangely out of place in this idyllic setting. The City of Mary grounds included the Convent of the Annunciation, a girls' grade school, and a small "cathedral" built of wood from the forest. I loved taking walks on the property.

Shortly after I had arrived there, Superior Sister Clementia asked for a volunteer to work in the kitchen. Since I was striving to be cheerful and cooperative, I offered to help.

"Sister, Redempta, I like you for being one of those special novices of Sister Flora," she said, loud enough for all the sisters in the room to hear.

Blushing, I went right to the kitchen to work. I wondered, "Who ever said that novices were special?" Sister Flora had once told me I was special because I had been in Rome when Our Lady crowned the bishop but, other than that, I was always feeling confused and guilty for my critical thoughts about the superiors, and not very special at all.

After finishing my kitchen duties, I went to Sister Clementia's office, dropped to my knees, and asked her what she meant by "special novices."

She replied that Sister Flora had told all the superiors about the obedience and holiness of the sisters at the Novitiate. She added that the other sisters could learn a few things from the novices about how to be good nuns.

I was floored that we were being held up as models of our congregation. I thought about the sisters back at Coeur d'Alene who really were special despite the punishments and penances imposed upon them. I didn't feel so holy myself, knowing the thoughts in my heart. One of the novices even remarked one day, "Sister Redempta, you always have the most pleasant look on your face...almost a smile. What are you thinking of?"

"God and how good He is," I responded, thinking that God was helping me deal with my trials and confusion. But I was certain that, if she had only known my true thoughts, she would have had a different opinion of me.

In my daily meditations and examinations of conscience, I resolved to smile more, out of a spirit of gratitude. I scolded myself for thinking unkind things about my superiors, even hating them at times; I knew they were representatives of God in my life. And, really, how could I complain about anything, when I was one of the few on earth chosen to restore Holy Mother the Church?

One Sunday in June, orders came in the early morning hours: "Quickly everyone! Get your things and get into the van. Let's go!"

We headed to the City of Mary for an urgent talk by Father Denis Chicoine.

As we drove up the final climb toward the church, I opened my eyes because the curve was making me feel nauseated (I had gotten permission to open my eyes in the van whenever I felt car sick). I was almost glad for my queasiness, because I was dying of curiosity about the reason for our sudden race to City of Mary. The parking lot was full of vans from all the religious houses, which meant the brothers were there, too. Something big was happening.

Father Denis, the bishop's co-leader for more than ten years, the one who had stood by the bishop and publicly denied all charges of impropriety, was now revealing shocking news about Schuckardt from the pulpit.

"I know this is going to be hard for all of you to believe," he began, "and I hate to make this announcement..."

He proceeded to read a letter that reviewed the confusing things that had happened during the past several months. As he read, he interspersed comments about how difficult it was for him to be revealing the bishop's drug addiction and moral problems, though he did not explain what he meant by "moral problems." Later, I asked Sister Flora about it.

"He's talking about the bishop having sex with other males who were forced to participate."

"Oh," I replied, quite shocked.

Chicoine's letter was charitable, yet to the point, and it provided explanations for the convoluted events of the preceding years. Although sympathetically alluding to the bishop's many ailments, Fr. Denis said that Schuckardt had grown increasingly dependent on his prescriptions, to the point of alarming his doctors. Recognition dawned as he described the side effects of these medicines—including headaches, hallucinations, convulsions, and nausea. All at once we understood the reason for the difficult, even unreasonable schedules we had been forced to keep.

Father Chicoine confirmed our new understanding that the bishop's illness and side effects of his medications were responsible for the complete and utter chaos that had reigned over the community for the last several years. He ticked off a list of events, even funerals that had been delayed or canceled because of the bishop's condition.

Fr. Chicoine also revealed that boxes of letters containing \$15,000 worth of out-of-date and uncashed checks had been found in the bishop's residence, even while members were being asked to donate

more money. Personal letters from religious to their families, dating back to the 1970s, had never been mailed.⁵⁰

Then he broached the most sensitive topic: the allegations of sexual contact with his young male assistants. They had written sworn statements saying they had been seduced and sexually abused—charges Schuckardt had staunchly denied. Fr. Chicoine and other priests had approached the bishop about the problem on several occasions and were left with the impression that everything had been “cleared up.” When it became obvious it hadn’t and Chicoine had threatened to bring it out into the open, the bishop had told everyone that his Vicar General had suffered a mental breakdown.

When Fr. Chicoine finished reading the letter, we were dismissed and returned to our lodgings. I went to the convent with the other nuns, and we talked about it as a group. While it was a big relief to know why our community life had been so bizarre, the whole thing was confusing and difficult to grasp. We wondered why God and the saints had not intervened sooner, even while we were trying so hard to be obedient and holy.

Some nuns, including my good friend, Sister Crucis, had not made it to Fr. Chicoine’s meeting. These sisters had been intercepted by the bishop’s aides and commanded not to attend.

The next day we were told there had been a shooting at the bishop’s mansion. We were given only hazy details, but the media had reported a scuffle involving a gunshot on his spacious lawn.

Apparently, Fr. Chicoine and a group of religious brothers had arrived to confront the bishop about the allegations of immoral conduct. When the bishop saw Chicoine’s group on the front lawn, he believed they were there to stage a *coup*. He feared for his life and was about to flee in one of his vans when a Chicoine follower jumped in and hijacked it. When he saw that one of Schuckardt’s men had a gun, he tried to knock it out of his hand and it accidentally fired. The van then crashed through the security gate and someone called the police. Officers determined that it had been an accident and that no one was hurt. They posted a 24-hour guard at the scene to prevent further trouble.⁵¹

By Thursday, Fr. Chicoine had filed a lawsuit in Superior Court asking that Bishop Schuckardt and his associates be barred from returning to Mount St. Michael’s and the South Hill residence.⁵²

Schuckardt and his faithful remnant went underground and were on the run for five months, moving from place to place throughout the Northwest and Canada, convinced that Chicoine had sent assassins after the bishop. Eventually, they took refuge in a motel in Lewiston, Idaho, because of the bishop's poor health. A reporter from Spokane's KREM-TV caught up with him for an interview. Still incredulous that his longtime associates would turn against him after his years of leadership, Bishop Schuckardt insisted that all the charges they had leveled against him were false. When asked if he had any message he wished to deliver to Fr. Chicoine, the bishop "excommunicated"⁵³ him on the spot.⁵⁴

Chicoine won the legal judgment by default since the bishop never appeared in court. Later, Schuckardt explained that he thought the summons was just an eviction notice. The court overturned the decision, ruling that Bishop Schuckardt had never been given proper legal notice. By then, however, Chicoine had reincorporated the Tridentines as the Latin Rite Catholic Church.⁵⁵

Father Chicoine's shocking announcement at the City of Mary ripped our dysfunctional little world in two. Schuckardt had been publicly disgraced, ousted from his palatial residence, and was now hiding somewhere with a small band of followers. He reportedly had absconded with a quarter of a million dollars of church funds. But it was the day the scales fell from our eyes.

The laity was split, the community was rife with rumors, and all of our scandals had been thoroughly exposed by the media. Chicoine himself was keeping a low profile at the Davenport Hotel, fearing that Schuckardt's faction might try to kill him. My brother, Alan, known at the time as Brother Brian, helped keep Fr. Denis *in cognito*.

While hearing the truth answered questions for me and provided some sense of relief, I was still very shocked by the whole story. I didn't feel angry with my parents, who had sent me into the community, but I did begin to scrutinize my own decisions and involvement with the group. I thought about my reasons for entering the convent, wondering if I had simply fallen under Schuckardt's spell. By the time the scandal had broken, I was twenty-four years old, and Schuckardt had become the principal figure in my life. His approval had meant everything to me, and I had believed that I was

helping to save the Church and its only true leader—by entering the convent.

I spent a good deal of time in front of the tabernacle of our small convent chapel during those days. I couldn't stop thinking about the superiors' cruel treatment of so many of the sisters. I wondered how I could continue obeying and respecting those same superiors who had done those things in front of me. In the end, I attributed their disgusting behavior to Schuckardt's influence. I reflected on Paul's epistle where he says, "All things work together unto good for those who love God." I was determined to make my experience "work unto good." I still believed the Church was in trouble and needed my service to restore the true Catholic faith to the world.

I decided to stay.

That summer all of the religious were permitted to have extra visits with their families. We were instructed to try and help our loved ones understand what had happened and offer to arrange meetings with our priests if they still had questions we couldn't answer. My parents were very distraught over the situation, admitting, "It's such a shock and shame that he used religion to get his way." They continued to go to mass at Mt. St. Michael but in the years following I would learn how they were never completely convinced we were still a legitimate group.

I was happy that my brother Patrick, who had gotten married by this time to a woman in the Fatima Crusade, seemed to be taking the whole thing all right and that he still planned to continue as a parishioner at Mt. St. Michael. I only saw Brother Brian (Alan) a few times that summer. Since it was always in passing when we saw one another, I never was sure what he thought about the whole ordeal. A year later Brother Brian left the congregation to return to the lay state, and that is when he told me he had been one of the leaders in instigating the confrontation with Schuckardt. I was so proud of Alan's courage. He left the seminary to get married, the thing he had always wanted to do in life—that is, before he had met the Fatima Crusaders.

Late that August, I took my first vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to my superiors. Ten other novices also took their vows. We were given blue veils to replace our white ones, and crowns of red and white roses to wear during a week of celebration.

28

FALLOUT

During my first year as a Blue Veil, I continued to live at the Novitiate in Coeur d'Alene but spent about half my time in Sister Clementia's convent at the City of Mary.

My days were filled with helping out at the school, working in the kitchen, and begging in town for the food and other things we needed. I had always felt more peaceful at the City of Mary, and that inner peace continued despite the fallout from the traumatic days under Schuckardt.

Things were in disarray in the community and in all the religious houses. Previously, all of our direction had come from the bishop; now we didn't have a bishop, nor did we have anyone who could consecrate a new bishop for us. We couldn't turn to Rome because we did not recognize the Pope, and we had long believed that no other "true" bishops still existed. What was our surprise, then, when we learned that Fr. Denis—upon whose shoulders had fallen the role of temporary leadership—had found us a new leader. He was Bishop George Musey.

The priests gathered us together to explain how this was possible. George Musey had once been a faithful adherent of the Roman Catholic Church, ordained a priest in the Galveston-Houston Diocese. Like us, he had been shocked by the liturgical changes wrought by the Second Vatican Council and considered them heretical. He left the Church and was eventually consecrated bishop by Bishop Moyses Carmona of Acapulco, who had been consecrated by the radical schismatic Vietnamese Archbishop Pierre Martin Ngo Dinh Thuc. All of these men were subsequently excommunicated by Pope John Paul II, which didn't bother us since we did not recognize

John Paul II as the true Pope. On the contrary, Musey's excommunication qualified him for the highest leadership role in our organization.⁵⁶

The new bishop ordained three new priests at Mount St. Michael's. A local CBS News affiliate showed up to interview Musey, who emphasized the many opportunities he now had to exercise the grace of God among such wonderful people who had persevered through so much.⁵⁷

Father Bill Wassmuth issued a statement around this time, saying that his Cult Awareness Center had been partly responsible for Schuckardt's demise by publicizing his homosexual activities. While acknowledging that it was possible for cults to change their harmful practices, he pointed out that the cult's problems may not have gone away with Schuckardt, and he promised that his Center would keep a watchful eye on Musey to ensure justice and respect of human rights for members.⁵⁸

During all of this, I was happily assisting in the girls' elementary school and, for a time, it was a wonderful experience. I was assigned to help Sister Simone, a very sweet teacher, whom the third and fourth grade girls clearly loved. Coming from the harsh environment of the Novitiate, I was impressed by her gentle approach to discipline. We soon became friends. I enjoyed helping her in the boarding home we kept down the street for little girls who came from around the country.

At Easter, I went home to visit my family and excitedly told my parents about this new friend and the work we were doing. When I returned from the visit, I learned that this sister had decided to leave the convent. I was devastated by this news. When I asked what might have been the reason for her leaving, I was told, "Sister was very close to her mother."

It sounded too much like what I had been told about Sister Diana.

Shortly after the arrival of Bishop Musey, a religious retreat day was organized, at which he gave a few talks that I found reassuring and inspiring. He reviewed the messages Our Lady gave at Fatima and helped us sort out our practice of her requests. He praised us for dedicating our lives to spreading the message. He agreed that the Church needed the clear direction provided by Fatima in order to

avoid a great chastisement. Bishop Musey's support of one of my own reasons for becoming a nun, to save the faith, strengthened my confidence that I was doing the right thing by staying in the convent.

I sat in the pew eager to hear whatever else he had to say. He did point out that it would be good for each of us to closely examine our way of life. He compared the changes our group was facing to the death of a person and said we would have to die to our old ways to be reborn into something more glorious. Resisting change and clinging to comfortable, old ways of thinking were normal reactions but, just as life after death is more wonderful than life on earth, we must embrace this death to self as a necessary step to healing.

By August, I thought we were finally on the way to making things better, so I was shocked when two more sisters suddenly left the convent. One of them was my superior, Sr. Clementia, and the other was a teacher. They had left as soon as school had ended, leaving the City of Mary convent without a superior.

Sister Lauren was assigned to replace Sister Clementia, a challenge she embraced wholeheartedly. Her friendliness and optimism were impressive, especially in view of the abuse she had suffered under Schuckardt's reign. Yet she treated us as though we had suffered equally, and never demanded special treatment or deference.

I was getting close to taking my three-year vows and, whenever nuns left, I wondered if they knew something I didn't. I was also heartbroken, because I missed their company and friendship. They had been part of my spiritual life and I truly considered them sisters. I mourned their disappearance from my life, especially when they left—over twenty-five of them by 1990. By 2000, I had lost count but the number had climbed to over fifty. The male religious and priests kept watching their brethren leave too, but their affairs were harder to track since we had little contact with them on a daily basis.

Sister Clementia moved away, though not far, and she, along with another sister who had left our community, transferred their loyalties to the Society of St. Pius X Parish in Post Falls, Idaho. I was curious about what this other parish had to offer. I asked Sr. Lauren for permission to speak to the priest there, and was surprised and grateful when she granted it.

One evening, the two former sisters picked me up down the road from the convent, not wanting to risk being seen by the other sisters. I dressed in street clothes to avoid drawing attention. We had a very happy reunion and agreed that it was quite "un-Schuckardt-like" of

Sr. Lauren to let me leave the confines of our community to get my questions answered.

Before taking me to see the priest, Sister Clementia, now known as Jeanne, gave me a quick tour of the church and school, which seemed normal to me; that is, as traditional as ours. Then, as I faced this young priest, I felt strange for dressing in lay clothes.

Nevertheless, I asked him to tell me about the history of his group and its beliefs concerning the Pope and the rest of Catholicism in the world. I thought he had pretty much the same views as the TRLC, but he believed that his group was the true remnant of Catholicism; he did not recognize Schuckardt or any other of the Traditionalist bishops other than the French bishop, Marcel Lefebvre.

Bishop Lefebvre, who considered Vatican II a big mistake, had warned that the true Catholic faith and sacraments would become extinct without properly trained and consecrated clergy. Though he recognized the legitimacy of post-Vatican II Popes, Lefebvre taught that it was permitted to disobey them since they were not adhering to Church traditions. As far as he was concerned, these popes had not promoted any heresies, but they could be ignored in favor of more traditional thinking and practices.⁵⁹

This patient young priest encouraged me to pray for light and said he'd be there if I ever needed to talk to him in the future. The ex-sisters drove me back to the City of Mary where, for the rest of the summer, I mulled over what I had learned from him.

While the male leadership labored to untangle and understand the complexities of proper apostolic succession, we sisters puzzled over how to restructure our lives. We needed to recreate our reality—our daily chores and good works, the prayers we would recite and even how we would dress.

Inadequate nutrition, sleep, and exercise had taken their toll on the health of many of us, and inner conflicts lingered, as well. Certain people needed to confess and apologize for what they had put others through, and many more needed to forgive. Our efforts were hampered by the fact that we had been conditioned to ignore our personal feelings, so it was difficult to sort all these things out and proceed in an authentic manner.

Bishop Musey and Father Chicoine saw that we needed help and scoured the planet for additional Traditionalist priests. Because we believed we had been the only remnant of true Catholics in the world, it seemed miraculous when they found some priests who thought as we did about Vatican II and the Latin mass. We were thrilled to realize that we weren't alone in the world but part of a larger Traditional family.

One of the first priests invited to visit us had previously belonged to Lefebvre's group. I was curious about his ideas concerning the papacy, curious to hear how his views might mesh—or not mesh—with what I'd heard from the Lefebvre priest during my covert trip to Post Falls. Sr. Ludmilla arranged for the two of us to meet with this former Lefebvre priest. I liked him a lot and thought that my parents would have followed him instead of Schuckardt, had they had the chance in the 70s when they were searching for Traditional priests. As I listened to him, it was hard not to dwell on the “what ifs” of that scenario.

In the end, with Ludmilla's reassurance, I was convinced that CMRI was the only theologically sound community, and, in August 1985, I decided to renew my vows for three years.

The non-affiliated priests were all very understanding and offered encouraging words, praising us for striving to be authentic in dedicating our lives to God. Eventually, however, they began to question things about our faith that they just didn't understand. Sometimes, they made unwelcome suggestions to our priests and we would then eventually hear that they had not been invited back.

Bishop Musey tried his best to help us but found himself in a thorny situation. One day, he declared that we would probably never recover from our wounds and recommended that we all go home to re-evaluate our faith, our community, our vows, and the future. Everybody's hair stood on end.

“What does he mean? We know what we're doing!” we insisted.

A contentious public debate ensued, with priests and religious confronting the bishop before the entire community. It became clear that our leaders could take only so much change at a time, and they would cut off anyone who did not agree with them. So, even though he had the title of bishop, Musey never prevailed. He was not immediately pushed out, but his days were numbered. Because our group desperately needed the sacraments only a bishop could provide, we put up for a time with Musey's constant pressure to

conform to the norms of other Traditionalist Catholics. Unfortunately, his inadequate training left him without the resources needed to deal with the imbroglio at Mount St. Michael's.

He was finally ousted and a few of our nuns left with him to start a new convent under his direction. Musey later reflected, "I didn't realize the patient was going to bleed to death when I started operating."⁶⁰

My parents and my brothers Alan and Patrick had attended the confrontational meeting. My parents thought the issues discussed were disturbing and confusing, and from that point on I sensed their trust in our priests was shaken even more. My brothers thought the meeting shouldn't have been public but nothing that was presented seemed to rock their boat and they continued to support our priests.

Slowly but surely, however, some of the recommendations from the visiting clergy began to take hold. They had suggested that we hold a formal, democratic decision-making process called a "chapter." The nuns were encouraged to discuss the details of our lives and then vote on a formal set of rules and constitutions. In this way, regular meals, undisturbed sleep and recreation could be formally incorporated into our daily life. We would vote on the prayers we wanted to say and the work we wanted to do. Responsible people were managing our money now and we were able to purchase healthful food. The unreasonable vocal prayer schedule from our Schuckardt days was reduced to make room for quiet personal reflection. We planned and fervently hoped that the new Rule and Constitutions would be approved by our next bishop, whomever that would turn out to be.

29

MOSTLY PEACEFUL ADJUSTMENTS

I was now stationed full-time at the City of Mary, teaching third and fourth grade girls.

My training for this career had consisted of watching other nuns while helping out in the classrooms. When I was in the Novitiate, Sister Flora had told me that she thought I would make a good teacher, and I held onto that. Basically, I became a teacher on the strength of the belief that I could do it.

I enjoyed the freedom of being able to plan my time and spend my days without the constant interruptions for meaningless exercises, corrections, and lectures that had been the norm in the novitiate under Sister Flora. I liked Sr. Lauren's casual leadership style. She took her new role seriously but never forgot her past. She spoke with me as an adult and a friend. She had already proven that she trusted me when she had let me visit the outside priest. We shared a mutual respect, and she listened to my issues with an open mind. She participated in our common discussions of life under Schuckardt and the many bizarre experiences we had lived through.

Part of the sisters' healing came from singing together, either our own compositions or more challenging classical pieces. And we always had plenty of household projects to do that brought us together, painting rooms, laying carpet, and hauling firewood. In winter, we shoveled snow and, when the pipes froze and broke, we brought water in barrels from one of our nearby properties. Sister Lauren worked along with us and made sure that we always had good, nutritious food, enough sleep, and plenty of laughter, to make the work bearable. It was a simple, beautiful time and, with her in charge, our convent group became a tight-knit community.

In the reformed atmosphere, increased spiritual reflection was encouraged. We began to see that accumulated prayers and penances did not necessarily lead to a healthy spirituality. Now, we were focused on uniting ourselves with God. I felt drawn back to St. Therese's "Little Way" of seeking this union; I tried to do my ordinary tasks in an extraordinary way. My interior prayer of offering was reduced to the simple, "Oh, my Jesus, it is for love of Thee!" I eventually reduced even this to "All for Thee." I found that this way of living was both difficult and fulfilling.

My mind, body, and soul were gaining strength, though occasionally my thoughts would drift back to the Schuckardt years.

One evening at sunset, I was standing on top of the hill and gazing down at the gathering shadows below. The evergreens on surrounding hills were casting silhouettes against the fading pink of the twilight sky. Suddenly, in the dusk, I caught sight of an old man. He seemed to be staggering up the long, steep hill toward the City of Mary. My mind raced as I tried to figure out who it was. Could it be the enemy from my days in Coeur d' Alene who had driven the truck with the signs, lurching up the hill, drunk, to confront us? Was it some crazed parent coming to snatch one of the sisters from the convent? I was ready to spring into action and call for help when I saw the figure turn. When four legs appeared, I realized it wasn't a man at all. It was the neighbor's gray horse that had strayed away from home. I laughed so long and hard at the illusion brought about by my lingering paranoia that my sides hurt.

My newly discovered peace of soul was seriously disturbed one day that year when we were at choir practice. Sister Ludmilla had leaned over and said, "I wonder how the wedding is going."

"What wedding?" I asked.

Her eyes got huge and my stomach turned over when she shocked me with, "Didn't you know your brother Alan is getting married today?" She said she thought I knew.

Later, my parents explained that the priest had wanted only the parents and two witnesses at the wedding. The priest had felt the wedding would have scandalized the community since both my brother and his bride had recently left religious life. To ensure the secret, the priest had stationed a guard at the bottom of the hill. It

made no sense to me that, under our more relaxed rules, I was not allowed to attend this family event.

I was also still feeling the pain of losing sisters from our convent. I decided that these losses must be a necessary part of my healing and death to self. Still, I wanted to hear directly from them why they had left. I did not trust the explanations we were given by our leaders.

Under Schuckardt, I had never heard superiors expressing differences of opinion. They always seemed to be in agreement and unquestioning of each other's way of doing things. So when my superior, Sister Lauren, openly opposed her superior, Sister Ludmilla, I paid attention. It was foreign behavior. Sister Ludmilla, who had come to stay for a few days, had been charged by Father Chicoine with visiting all the convents in our community to see how the sisters were doing. She was to oversee the affairs of the sisters until we developed a plan for voting in a superior. There was always tension in the air during her stay.

Sister Ludmilla was enthusiastic about remodeling in general and, when she visited us, she would make recommendations: "Put up some curtains here," "Add some paintings there," and so on.

"We're fine," Sister Lauren would tell Sr. Ludmilla. "We don't need any more decorating or fluff. I'd rather have the sisters focusing on their prayer life and how they're going to get past the trauma they've been through."

I admired Sister Lauren's courage in speaking her mind. It gave me hope for our congregation's future. The important lessons of asking questions, sharing one's thinking, and respectfully debating one's point were not lost on me.

Our group of sisters under Sr. Lauren was happily bonding, and my days of sneaking around to help the victims of the superiors' cruelties were over. We now lived in a spiritually, physically, and psychologically healthier environment, in which it was safe to ask questions and focus on important matters.

30

NEW CHALLENGES

In 1986 the community enlisted the services of Bishop Robert McKenna, the head of an independent Traditionalist community in Monroe, Connecticut, who had been consecrated in France by the Thuc bishop Guerard des Lauriers.⁶¹ For several years, McKenna commuted from Connecticut to Spokane to administer the sacrament of confirmation and to ordain new priests.

Before McKenna arrived the first time, our priests prepared us by explaining that, though he had some differences of understanding about the papacy, he was close enough to our beliefs that it was okay for us to accept him. Unlike us, McKenna believed that the Popes after Vatican II were “legal” because no one had proven otherwise. However, he believed that these Popes had strayed morally by falling into heresy and they, therefore, did not have true authority; they did not rule in Christ’s name. And therefore, we were not bound to obey them.

I loved the challenge of trying to make sense of this, but the pieces were not all fitting together, and left me uncomfortable. The concept of *sedevacantism*⁶² had been ingrained in us and held up as the only legitimate position on the matter. In a way, it was a relief to know that there were more theories, any of which could be embraced in good conscience.

As I prepared for my final vows, I was proud of the position of CMRI. I loved my Holy Mother the Church, and I was happy to know that our little world had been expanded to include other groups of like-minded Catholics. Though, technically, I was only one year into my three-year vows, I was eager to be considered “out of training” so that I could do more active work. I was tired of my years

in the cloister. I asked for an exception to the rules and was allowed to take final vows early, which greatly upset my mother.

"Don't you want to wait, since there have been so many problems?" she asked.

But I didn't want to wait. The day of the ceremony, she sat in the choir loft crying behind dark sunglasses.

My turn to cry would be coming before long.

Bishop McKenna would be the one to approve the decisions made at our first chapter in July, 1986. There we hashed out the details of our daily life. Everyone had a chance to speak and, even though there were lots of disagreements, most of the sisters agreed that progress had been made. They nominated Sister Ludmilla to be Mother General. She seemed to be the most logical choice despite some regrettable history in her previous positions as superior and teacher. Her wit, intelligence, and even charisma would be assets in the difficult years ahead. Four counselors were elected to assist Sister Ludmilla.

My wonderful year with Sister Lauren at the City of Mary came to an abrupt end shortly thereafter, when Mother General Ludmilla split us up and scattered the sisters among the various convents. She took Sister Lauren to live with her at the Mt. St. Joseph Convent in Colbert, claiming that she needed her help there.

I was assigned to live at the bishop's former four-story mansion on the South Hill in Spokane. The fancy décor of the residence was quite a switch from our simple quarters at the City of Mary. My superior was Sister Estrella, who had the responsibility for two groups of sisters: the ones who ran the print shop and the ones who taught in the elementary schools. Sister Estrella did her best to establish the semblance of family life for us, despite our heavy schedules. By the end of the year we had bonded and shared an understanding of each other's responsibilities.

I was assigned to teach the third and fourth grade boys and girls at Mount St. Michael's, and a group of us sisters commuted there every day in the van. I would occasionally run into Sister Lauren who told me about her difficulties with Reverend Mother Ludmilla and

her concerns about a power struggle involving one of the sisters, Sister Claudia, and Father Louis, who had been seen spending a lot of time together.

Father was the pastor of Mt. St. Michael and the priest in charge of the boys' high school at Mt. St. Michael. These two seemed to have undue influence both over the schedule and over Reverend Mother, causing problems for Sister Lauren. When she challenged Reverend Mother about who was really calling the shots at the convent, Ludmilla dodged her questions and accused her of having a personality conflict with the interfering sister. The tension continued to escalate throughout that year.

I was grateful for the education and support we received from the priests that year. It helped to solidify in my mind that staying in the convent had been the right thing for me to do. Through Bishop McKenna, our congregation was introduced to a constant flow of new ideas about theology, religious life, and other clergy and groups of Traditional Catholics. We also studied psychology and various theories about personality types. We were guided in our attempts to evaluate criticisms of our community that were circulating around the country. Over the years, I had zealously assembled several binders of material for and against us, for my own use. I wanted to be as informed as possible about the Traditional movement in order to respond effectively when challenged.

A bright spot in the life of the Order was our Singing Nun group, started by our Sisters in 1979, to raise funds for our various ministries.

I was assigned to be part of the group in 1985 and spent many hours in voice training, choir practices, and recording studios. We performed at shopping malls, nursing homes, on streetcars, in airplanes, at parks and the World's Fair, for holiday festivals, and on radio and television. The glowing media reports were a welcomed change from the mountain of negative publicity we had endured, and the experience gave us a much-needed psychological lift.

The singing trips were draining in some ways, however. We often traveled in summer and sweltered in our full-length habits. Wearing a

habit in public is something like living in a fishbowl; people watched our every move and we had to be on our best behavior at all times.

In addition to providing a nice break from the drama swirling around the convents, the trips also provided a litany of adventures that we would reminisce about for years to come. Our travels took us throughout the United States. But the fun and excitement of traveling did not dispel the sadness I felt at the eventual absence of so many of my sisters, many of whom had been part of our singing group in its earliest days. Every year one or more sisters left the convent for one reason or another.

By the end of the year, Sister Lauren had had it with Ludmilla and asked to be sent away. She ostensibly went on to explore other Traditional convents, but we never heard from her after that.

The next thing I knew, I was assigned to live at the very place from which Sister Lauren had been trying to escape. I packed all my worldly possessions into my brown leather suitcase and moved to Mount St. Joseph Convent, with Reverend Mother Ludmilla and Sister La Salette as superior and assistant superior, respectively. My job was to teach seventh and eighth grade girls under Sister Mary Claudia, principal of Immaculata Girls' High School.

Mount St. Joseph's was a former boys' ranch in a pastoral setting of rolling hills. The school was a two-story building with a gymnasium that had been converted into a chapel. It was possible to be alone on paths leading through tall grasses to a small pond; I loved the beautiful scenery there.

Much to my delight, my old friend Sister Marielle was living there as well, and I was thrilled to be under the same roof with her again. Even though she still was dealing with the lupus she had developed during the traumatic years at the novitiate, she was fun and cheerful. I loved going to her little room to visit her and her two parakeets, Mozart and Bach. As we gradually woke up to the problems in our convent, we would "let our hair down" behind the closed door of her tiny room and freely share our worries and concerns.

Principal Claudia wasn't at all impressed by my classroom techniques. But despite her hovering disapproval, I could plainly see

the beneficial fruits of my teaching methods among my students. They responded much more positively to flexibility and encouragement than to the harsh, controlling environment favored by the principal, who observed me constantly and often called me in to criticize what I was doing.

"You can't have the girls out of their desks! You had them on the floor again," she'd complain.

She needed two weeks' notice if I planned to stray from the fixed study plan. She wanted to control my spontaneous response to my students' interests and needs. She denied my requests to let the girls get exercise by running freely on the property. And she denied my request to let me drive the girls to Mount St. Michael's to use the gym, like the junior high boys got to do everyday, which I pointed out to her. She pooh-poohed my ideas, always deflecting the blame to her friend Father Louis and Reverend Mother and their desire to ensure proper education of the girls.

I found myself having to make endless justifications to Sister Claudia for my teaching methods and, after being called on the carpet umpteen times I would attempt to seek relief from Ludmilla. She would reply, "Sister Claudia and Father Louis are in charge and there really is nothing I can do. Just try to do the best you can."

"Who put them in charge?" I grumbled to myself. "I thought we had elected Sister Ludmilla to be Mother Superior."

It became clear to me how Sister Lauren must have struggled the year before.

By late winter it became evident that other sisters were having problems, too. There had been several meetings between our elected counselors and Mother Ludmilla, but none of them had been productive. It seemed that the idea of having counselors to represent the sisters was all a game; they had no real power, no say in how we were to live. In addition, Reverend Mother Ludmilla was making her own little tweaks to the Rule we had just voted in. Though her changes were insignificant, they were annoying and added to our feelings of helplessness. Eventually, we learned that the four counselors had resigned. It seemed that the whole point of having them had been merely a formality; in their place, a few strong-willed personalities were going to run things behind the scenes for the foreseeable future.

It wasn't long before I heard that Sister Lauren had asked to be released from her vows. Mother Ludmilla blamed her departure on

depression over her mother's death. She told us to pray for her, now Lynne, and to concentrate on our own efforts to excel in our vocations.

The depression excuse did not make sense to me. I had never seen Sister Lauren depressed; we had laughed all the time and had enjoyed many things together. I realized that, whenever anyone left the Order, the trend was to cast vague aspersions over their good names; it was never the Order that was at fault, but never was the given explanation a completely reasonable one. Dark shadows hovered over any departure.

Several months after Sister Lauren left, I finally broke down on a solitary walk through one of the surrounding fields. Years of unexplained departures from sisters I had grown so close to had taken their toll, and I cried my eyes out. I prayed, too, with great fervor for understanding and guidance. Since I had no answers that day, I made up my mind to continue doing the best thing I could think of, which was to live my vows, to continue to obey Reverend Mother Ludmilla and to trust God to take care of the rest.