



Mother Theresa is Called to America

“Mother Theresa’s sense of mission presupposed a call. She did not search out fields of ministry; she responded to definite calls that came to her attention through bishops, pastors, parishioners, government officials, signs of the times, or personally perceived needs. Once aware of a need for her sisters, she explored the possibilities of the situation, and endeavored to respond.”¹ This attitude and approach led to rapid and far reaching expansion of the SSND congregation.

In the early part of the 19th century, many German Catholics immigrated to America, hoping to make a better life for themselves and their families. Mission societies, concerned for their welfare, were established back home. The Leopold Foundation of Vienna sent German Redemptorist priests to Pennsylvania in 1832. The Louis Mission Society of Bavaria believed that actually transplanting religious communities to the United States could add stability, and sent missionaries of various congregations to minister in poor German immigrant communities. As early as 1845, the Redemptorist Provincial Superior petitioned the king of Bavaria (there was no separation of church and state in Bavaria) for SSND’s for the American missions. The hope was to establish a motherhouse in St. Mary’s, Pennsylvania, which was expected to become the center of a thriving German community.

Even in the early years of the congregation, visitors from America, including bishops, stopped by at the Motherhouse in Bavaria to ask for sisters to teach the very poor German immigrants, and Mother Theresa was truly concerned about them. She welcomed this formal request to send sisters to America and in the Motherhouse were many young sisters who eagerly volunteered to go to the missions.

This request also came at a critical moment: because of political unrest in Bavaria, a royal ordinance had forbidden the taking of vows by SSND novices. This government act caused Mother Theresa great uncertainty about the future of the SSND congregation in Germany. She therefore wrote to the Archbishop of Munich on April 8, 1847, “Considering these circumstances, [I] recognize, in the call for School Sisters to America, an indication of Divine Providence who merci-

¹ Quotations and material taken from *Love Cannot Wait* by Benilda Dix, SSND, 1987.

fully directs us to a new field of labor while our hands are being tied here." She was very anxious about the young sisters "who look forward to a sad future on account of the latest incidents in Bavaria. We will go to this mission with great trust in the help of God, who never forgets the poor."

Within three months, Mother Theresa and her first band of young missionaries were on their way to the United States.

Questions for reflection and sharing

1. What in this story is most striking to you?
2. What can we learn about Mother Theresa from the way she handled the request for sisters in America?
3. What meaning might this story have for us here, today?

Prayer

Prayer response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.

Loving God, with confidence, we offer these petitions:

- ❖ In gratitude for Mother Theresa's hearing God's call in the signs of the times, we pray....
- ❖ That each of us will be blessed with attentive listening and courage to act, we pray...
- ❖ *Please add your own prayers..... we pray...*

Concluding Prayer:

Glory to you, Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.