8-8-2017

Walking With the Whirlwind of Change: Adrian Dominican Sisters and American Society in Transition, 1960-2017

Louise Milone
WALKING WITH THE WHIRLWIND OF CHANGE:

ADRIAN DOMINICAN SISTERS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY IN TRANSITION, 1960-2017

by

LOUISE MILONE

Under the Direction of Alex Sayf Cummings, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines a group of Adrian Dominican Sisters – how they maintained
equilibrium through life transforming change wrought by Vatican II by engaging in a process of
deep, long-term discernment. They are once again facing massive change. Their average age is
80, with as many as four sisters dying every month. Few new sisters are coming in, almost all of
whom are women of color and born outside of the US. The sisters see a bright future in this
demographic change. Through their history, their experiences of transformation track those of
our society. Yet, they have managed change much differently. Through intense work, engaging
in years of reflection on values, needs and desires, relying on each other for support, they have
successfully transformed their lives and congregation. What can they teach us about coping with
change? What can we learn from their process and from their outcomes, productive or
dislocating?

INDEX WORDS: Sisters, Catholic, Poverty, Feminism, Civil rights, Human rights, Education
WALKING WITH THE WHIRLWIND OF CHANGE:
ADRIAN DOMINICAN SISTERS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY IN TRANSITION, 1960-2017

by

LOUISE MILONE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
2017
Copyright by
Louise Irene Milone
2017
WALKING WITH THE WHIRLWIND OF CHANGE:
ADRIAN DOMINICAN SISTERS AND AMERICAN SOCIETY IN TRANSITION, 1960-2017

by

LOUISE MILONE

Committee Chair: Alex Sayf Cummings
Committee: Ian Christopher Fletcher

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University
August 2017
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Sr. Mary Priniski, without whom I never would have thought of this project, been able to meet the sisters and certainly would never have completed it. I am grateful for her patience and willingness to read this through its many editions and for her encouragement. And, to my friend, Ross Konigsburg, who has always been there for me.

I also dedicate this work in deep gratitude to my advisor Dr. Alex Sayf Cummings and my reader Dr. Ian Christopher Fletcher. Without their encouragement, assistance and guidance, I would never have sought my MA degree, let alone undertaken and finished this project.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to Sr. Mary Priniski, I have to thank the amazing sisters of the Adrian Dominican Congregation for giving me the extraordinary privilege of working with them and getting to know them. My appreciation especially goes out to those who participated in this project: Sr. Maria Riley, Sr. Peter Anthony Schulte, Sr. Mary Ann Ennis, Sr. Mary Rae Waller, Sr. Aneesah McNamee, Sr. Marilin Llanes, Sr. Xiomara Méndez-Hernández, and to those who know them, worked with them and helped me to know them better: Fr. James Hug, Cathy Feister, John Feister, John Newbauer, Mary Newbauer and Fr. Les Schmidt.

In addition to my committee members, Alex Sayf Cummings and Ian Christopher Fletcher, a special thank you to Georgia State University and to the History Department faculty and staff, who made it possible for me to learn from them in so many ways.

I am also so grateful to the archivists of Notre Dame University and Catholic University for their graciousness, patience and help as I spent days in their facilities looking through the materials of the Center of Concern and the Catholic Committee of the South respectively. They are exceptional professionals, always willing to share their knowledge with suggestions to solve challenges or ideas to add to my research. I also want to recognize Traci Drummond and the staff of the Special Collections Department of the Georgia State University Library, who patiently worked with me when I was first learning about the wonders of archival research.

I also want to thank my friend and fellow graduate student, Wendy Giere-Frye, with whom I have studied and shared the discouraging and encouraging days.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ V

1  **INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................................. 1

1.1  For Teaching Sisters, a Century of Struggle for Common Sense ................................. 3

1.2  A Time of Transformation for Society and the Catholic Church .............................. 8

1.3  An Expected Bench Warmer Pope Surprises and Upends the Church ............... 12

1.4  Vatican II Brings the Church into the Modern World ............................................. 14

1.5  An Arduous Process of Change – The Sisters Hear the Call of Vatican II.......... 16

1.6  Chapter Outlines .............................................................................................................. 25

2  **MARIA RILEY, O.P., PH.D.** ......................................................................................... 29

2.1  Formation as a Woman Religious and a Social Activist ........................................... 30

2.2  A Bicentennial Celebration Giving Voice to Laity, Bishops Shut it Down .......... 35

2.3  Riley Joins the COC – Makes Their Social Justice Struggle Her Own ............. 37

2.4  A Catholic Feminist Works to Empower Women in Church and Society.... 40

2.5  Bishops Try Defining the Role of Women in the Church and Fail Again .... 46

2.6  Riley Takes on Poverty in the Global South and the US .................................... 50

2.7  Riley Creates the International Gender and Trade Network ............................. 57

2.8  Half a Century Given in the Service of Social Justice ......................................... 59

3  **PETER ANTHONY SCHULTE, O.P., M.ED.** ................................................................. 61

3.1  An Education System Emerges from Religious Disputes in Public Schools 63
3.2 To Her Surprise, Schulte Becomes a Teacher and a Baker ..................... 66
3.3 An Innovative Education Program is Scuttled by an Inflexible Clergy .... 69
3.4 Learning Through Experience – Teaching with Understanding.............. 75
4 MARY PRINISKI, O.P., PH.D................................................................. 77
   4.1 A Really Catholic Family Leads to Being an Adrian Dominican Sister ..... 79
   4.2 Americans Begin a Long Period of Painful Economic Retrenchment .... 85
   4.3 Being Present to Bear Witness While Taking Action Against Injustice ..... 89
   4.4 Deaths of Three Black Men Lead to New Battles - New Friends......... 95
   4.5 Catholic Justice Institution Forced to Close Is Re-established............ 98
   4.6 Walking the Trail of Tears as Respect and Remembrance................. 101
   4.7 Walking with Bishops Toward Justice for Prisoners and Workers....... 103
   4.8 Worker Justice Becomes Central to Priniski Again............................ 105
   4.9 Serving Her Family of Sisters and Her Catholic Community............... 107
   4.10 Four Decades “Being Present” for Justice...................................... 109
5 EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION .................................................................... 110
   5.1 Changing Together Through Reflection, Dialogue and Collaboration.... 111
   5.2 Accepting Reality and Adapting to Systemic Change in our World....... 116

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................. 120
1 INTRODUCTION

Adrian today…
is a point in time…neither beginning nor end…
but encompassing both in the moment that is NOW

Adrian today…
is a point in time…neither comfort nor completion…
but the moment of daring rededication… the God-given time to sing

Noreen McKeough, OP
The Song of Jubilee, 1984

Sr. Noreen McKeough wrote her “Song of Jubilee” on the one hundredth anniversary of the arrival in Michigan of the group of nuns who would eventually form the Adrian Dominican Congregation of sisters. She pasted this poem onto the title page of her copy of the book that told the story of her family of sisters. The history laid out in that book is of many decades during which these sisters were forming and reforming to accomplish a mission. It is a story of constant renewal, of risk and hard work, of advancement and retrenchment. It is a story that aligns with the history of America and yet is apart from it in some fundamental way. Their church seems to align with the traditional and liberalizing movements of secular society, but the resultant actions taken by the sisters come more slowly, after study, thinking and discussion – through and by community.

Their is a story of succeeding generations of women, continually dedicated to an immutable set of values and to a particular concept of sisterhood that encouraged them to experience substantial, cultural change through a process of discernment leading most of them, most often, to productive acceptance. This is the story of how, in particular times of roiling change, the Adrian Dominican Sisters accomplished that renewal, what three of their members
did with their new opportunities and how this family of sisters is dealing with its present, equally difficult transition.

This project primarily examines their story during the last half of the twentieth century, while also looking at their current situation in an epilogue. For America, these were times of massive change in the Catholic Church and in society at large. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, Dominican sisters had been in America for over 125 years, the first Dominican sisters having arrived in the United States in 1822. The Adrian Dominicans were formed in the US by a Bavarian order of nuns, some of whom were invited to come to help with the German-speaking parishes that were flourishing in America in the mid-nineteenth century. It was also a time when Catholics were suffering discrimination in every aspect of their lives, which sometimes resulted in violence. In 1853, Mother Benedicta Bauer, the Bavaria superior for the Ratisbon Nuns, asked their bishop for permission to send some of her congregation to America. In her book on the early years of the congregation, Sr. Mary Philip Ryan tells us how that decision was made:

The Rt. Rev. Abbot Wimmer of St. Vincent’s Abbey, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., called upon us and …expressed the wish that some of our Nuns would found a convent and missions in America…for the salvation of the neglected Catholic children, particularly those of the German immigrants.

Four very young, German-speaking nuns arrived in New York City in 1853, to be greeted at the docks by – no one. Eventually, they made their way to a rectory in Brooklyn where they were not expected. However, they stayed in that New York diocese for over thirty years, providing ministry to the clergy and their parishioners. When they finally left for the Midwest,

---

1 In the context of this work, “women religious” refers to Catholic sisters or nuns and “men religious” to brothers or priests. To learn more about the differences you can click on this link here or refer to http://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-meaning-of-the-terms-nun-sister-monk-priest-and-brother.html. There are differences between sisters and nuns, mainly by the vows they take and how they are covered by Canon Law, the Catholic legal system. For additional information, you can click this link here to take you to the website of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and their Canon Law section or go to http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/canon-law/.

2 Mary Philip Ryan, O.P., Amid the Alien Corn (St. Charles: Jones Wood Press, 1967), 27.
they landed first in Traverse City and then in Adrian, Michigan. Outlining what these Dominican sisters accomplished in their early years in Adrian, Ryan says, “The foundation of St. Joseph’s Hospital in Adrian, though preceded by the opening of two schools there [1884], is significant for that reason that it officially became the provincial house (1892) and later the motherhouse (1923) of the Congregation of the Adrian Dominican sisters.” According to the custom in America for Dominican congregations, the sisters took the name of the city where their motherhouse was located. The Adrian Dominican Congregation had found the town from which they would take their name, where they would create Siena Heights University and where they still live and serve.3

The Adrian Dominican Congregation of sisters stands on a solid foundation of religious belief and dedication to mission. In the early to mid-twentieth century, in accordance with what was then expected of sisters in service of their mission, they carried out a rigorous schedule of prayer and ministry, the core of which was teaching. The sisters were expected to see their role as serving the church, mostly as the male hierarchy of the church saw fit. They were given minimal stipends to run the Catholic schools and hospitals and to do mission work in the local churches.4

1.1 For Teaching Sisters, a Century of Struggle for Common Sense

See to it, therefore, that they are well trained and that their education corresponds in quality and academic degrees to that demanded by the State. Be generous in giving them all they need, especially where books are concerned, so that they may continue their studies and thus offer young people a rich and solid harvest of knowledge. This is in keeping with the Catholic idea.

Pope Pius XII,  
Counsel to Teaching Sisters, September 15, 1951

---

3 Ryan, Amid the Alien Corn, 53-65.  
4 Information in this paragraph was stated and/or confirmed by: Mary Ann Ennis, O.P., MA., interview by author, Adrian, MI, April 28, 2017. Peter Anthony Schulte, O.P., M.Ed., interview by author, Adrian, MI, April 28, 2017. and Mary Margaret Priniski, O.P., Ph.D. interview by author, Atlanta, GA. June 10, 2017.
Pope Pius XII’s timing of his counsel corresponded to a movement by American teaching sisters that had gathered momentum in the late 1940s and was reaching a crescendo by the early to mid-1950s. This was also the time when the federal and state governments were responding to a call for better credentialed teachers, particularly to improve science and mathematics education as the US stepped up its competitive response to the Soviet Union’s advances in missile technology and nuclear weapons. The movement to properly educate American teaching sisters would also prove the efficacy of cross-congregation action, laying some of the groundwork for what was to come in the 1960s, when the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council would roil the world of women religious. However, at this time, before the midpoint of the twentieth century, the life that sisters experienced when they entered a religious congregation did not at all resemble the life they were leaving.

Most women who decided to enter religious life during this period had been taught by sisters in Catholic schools for at least some part of their elementary and secondary education. Entering a sisters’ congregation in the early twentieth century would mean walking into an enclosed environment, into a lifestyle of absolute rules that governed every hour of their day, that required that one ask a superior for even a stamp or a bar of soap. Sisters wore an adaptation of a thirteenth-century dress as their habit, which while it was admired as beautiful by many sisters and deemed a necessity by many clerics and members of the laity, was a complicated, uncomfortable dress that some sisters thought of as a potential obstacle to building relationships. Aside from work, sisters rarely left the convent and never left alone. For Adrians, work was almost always at a parish, teaching at the school, working on the liturgy or with the children and women’s groups or working at a sister-sponsored Catholic hospital, usually as a nurse.5

---

5 Ennis interview and Priniski interview, July 15, 2016.
Describing the life at the Adrian Dominican Motherhouse prior to 1970, one of the sisters said, “You know, we were very enclosed, we wore the same clothing, we had the same number of pairs of shoes, we could go home once every three years…our rules were to not be seen or heard.”\textsuperscript{6}

Initially, women deciding to join a congregation would come into the convent or the motherhouse as postulants, living around the sisters, experiencing something of the religious life they were considering. When they first came into the convent, they would leave their clothing and other possessions with the superior, changing into the clothes and shoes of a postulant, and beginning the process of study, prayer, and meditation required to make this momentous life decision. As the sisters who entered their congregations during this time will attest, there was always plenty of manual labor for the postulants to do around the convent. In addition, prior to the 1950s, if a postulant entering the Adrian Dominican Congregation had attended any college classes before she entered or was older than 17 or 18, she would be immediately sent to a convent attached to a school to begin teaching. She lived with an experienced teacher who acted as a mentor, teaching her what she needed to know to work in the classroom.\textsuperscript{7}

While congregations differed on the exact rules for postulants and novices, they were similar. Some congregations would have less time as postulants and more time as novices than the Adrian Dominicans, but it added up to approximately 18 months to two years. For the Adrian Dominican Congregation, after a year as a postulant (by the 1960s – 6 months), if a woman decided she wanted to continue, she would be received into the novitiate. The year of copious study for women in the novitiate would include classes in philosophy and theology, a study of their vows and a course in the history of the congregation, as well as whatever manual

\textsuperscript{6} Interview with Adrian Dominican sister, Adrian, MI, July 19, 2016.
\textsuperscript{7} Schulte and Ennis interviews, April 28, 2017.
labor needed to be done. At the end of that time she would make first profession (vows), which she would repeat every year for five years, after which she would make final profession (vows). By the mid-1950s, 93,000 sisters were teaching in the almost 12,000 US Catholic elementary and secondary schools. In her article, “Ahead of its Time… Or Right on Time?,” Carol Coburn, Avila University professor of religious and gender studies, points out that, “Women teachers in public schools typically earned one-half of the salary of male teachers’ salaries, but sister-teachers by comparison earned only one-half to one-third of what female public-school teachers earned.” The low cost of teaching sisters appealed to the clergy and bishops, who expressed concern that if teaching sisters were too well educated, they would want to be paid more. Since clergy were reluctant to increase the cost of Catholic education, which was potentially problematic for the school, the parish, and the parents, most opposed congregation leaders in their struggle to get their entering sisters educated before they were assigned as teachers.

According to several Adrian Dominican sisters, aside from the obvious detriment to students and the professional distress for unprepared teachers, low remuneration also posed a serious financial problem for sisters and their congregations. The institutional church does not and, at least in modern times never has, provided for the support of the sisters. In the 1950s,

---


11 Angelyn Dries, “Living in Ambiguity: A Paradigm Shift Experienced by the Sister Formation Movement,” *Catholic Historical Review* 70, no. 3 (July 1993): [http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/eds/detail/detail?sid=d7bfd336-d612-42d9-a2fd-826a7e00b0c0@sessionmgr4008&vid=3&hid=4113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU=#AN=edsjsr.25024073&db=edsjsr](http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.gsu.edu/eds/detail/detail?sid=d7bfd336-d612-42d9-a2fd-826a7e00b0c0@sessionmgr4008&vid=3&hid=4113&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmU=#AN=edsjsr.25024073&db=edsjsr) (accessed May 11, 2017).
many of the teaching sisters received less than $50 a week from the dioceses during the months school was in session. They then returned half of their stipend to the motherhouse to support the operations of the congregation and to support the sisters who could no longer work. The miniscule amount of money available to be sent back to the congregation was not only used for the direct operations of the congregation, it was also needed to set up a fund to provide for the future welfare of the sisters. That fund would become very important in the twenty-first century, when few women are entering congregations and the number of sisters young enough to continue working is rapidly diminishing.\footnote{Ennis, Schulte and Priniski interviews.}

Starting in 1949, and becoming pronounced by the late 1950s, sisters and their leadership fought back against the church hierarchy on the subject of sisters’ education. To better organize their response and increase their leverage, a substantial number of sisters joined together to form the Sister Formation Conference (SFC) under the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA). The SFC leadership brought many of the congregations of sisters into coalition, working together for the first time to achieve their educational goals. They received a $50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to conduct a research project on curriculum, creating an undergraduate course of study geared toward the requirements of sisters who would become teachers, nurses, and social workers. These were the first of many projects of the SFC that included community projects and an SFC “bulletin” that permitted the sisters to communicate regularly across congregations.

Ennis, Schulte and Priniski interviews. Presently, sisters still usually live communally, now with roommates in regular secular housing arrangements or in a sisters’ residence. The Adrian Dominicans try to keep their living expenses to approximately $20,000 a year. They still submit their salary in excess of their living expenses to support the operations of the congregation and take care of the sisters who can no longer work. Sisters can make anywhere from minimum wage working in poverty programs, to hundreds of thousands of dollars working as college presidents and hospital administrators. Most are highly educated professionals, including many doctors and lawyers among their number. Now, those who cannot work greatly outnumber those who can, creating serious fiscal challenges for the congregations, which they are attempting to meet by strategies such as opening some of their nursing home facilities to the general public.
In 1964, after some interorganizational tensions between the SFC and the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSW), Vatican officials moved the SFC under the umbrella of CMSW. This caused deep distress for many of the SFC members who were proud of their grassroots origins and who believed that making them part of a superiors’ organization was detrimental to their ability to reach their goals. In “Ahead of its Time,” Coburn quotes Sisters Lora Ann Quinonez, CDP, and Mary Daniel Turner, SNDdeN, on the legacy of SFC. They say, “The Sister Formation Conference was, without question, the single most critical ground for the radical transformative process following Vatican II.”

1.2 A Time of Transformation for Society and the Catholic Church

It is in the recognition of the dynamic confluence of personal efforts and the social milieu, biography and history, the private and the public that we can understand social change.

Garth Massey
Ways of Social Change: Making Sense of Modern Times

The mid-twentieth century was an era of great promise, bursting with technological innovation and cultural creativity. It was also an era marred by old prejudices and new hatreds, engendering political and social upheaval that sometimes led to fearful violence. The long Sixties, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, saw people around the globe rethinking political, economic, and social arrangements and even their personal beliefs and creeds. But the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War cast a long shadow over life. Europe’s postwar recovery led to “economic miracles” and consumer societies, but also decolonization and a reduced role in the wider world. The United States emerged from the war largely unscathed and with an economy in overdrive, becoming, a global hegemon of enormous power and reach. In Empires in

---

13 Coburn, “Ahead of its Time,” 40. Includes information in the preceding paragraph as well.
World History, historians Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper discuss the extent of US economic power after World War II:

By 1945, the United States held the fate of former western European empires in its hands – or rather in its bank vaults. Debts to the United States and American financial assistance shaped the postwar decade, although Europe’s recovery was more rapid than most observers at the time expected…The United States provided incentives – including after 1949 a program of development assistance – for elites in new and old states to cooperate with transnational corporations and American policy. Washington used its economic and military muscle to prevent sovereign states from going too far against what were perceived as American interests.14

For the rest of the century, the US would be the undisputed leader of the West.

The Soviet Union had lost over twenty million of its people. Nonetheless, the Soviet Union and the new socialist countries of Eastern Europe were committed to advancing their communist ideology, positioning themselves as the counter to the classical liberal ideology of the United States and Western Europe. These two centers of power created a bifurcated world order, which however was soon challenged by the newly independent countries arising up from the breakup of colonial empires. Discussing the implications of the state of the Cold War, Burbank and Cooper observe, “Shifts set in motion by World War I and the Bolshevik revolution, accelerated by World War II, decolonization, and the start of the Cold War around 1948 seemed to turn a regime of several imperial powers into a bipolar world…But this characterization needs qualification: neither superpower could remake its subordinates at will, and the bipolar world was not symmetrical.”15 The “Third World” pushed back on the “bi-polar” nature of Cold War geopolitics, but to little avail. When the Soviet Union began to dissolve in 1989, the US remained an economic and military superpower.

---

15 Ibid., 431.
Meanwhile, back in the United States, Americans were finding themselves in an increasing cultural, political and religious divide. Black Americans, oppressed by their own compatriots, were challenging *de jure* and *de facto* separation from white American society through every means available – legal cases, civil disobedience, intellectual and moral argument, in short, any and all opportunities to make change within the prevailing system. The new medium of television brought their struggle for justice, and the violence with which it was frequently met, into the homes of millions of Americans, creating a groundswell of demand to end the shame segregation was bringing to Americans around the country, and to the US around the world. By the mid-1960s, the civil rights movement was eclipsed by another polarizing development, the war in Southeast Asia. Young men and some women were dying in Vietnam, a place most Americans only learned existed when US soldiers started coming home in body bags, causing many Americans to question why the US was even in that fight. Through it all was the arms race between the US and the Soviet Union and the prospect of a nuclear Armageddon. Historian David Farber observes in *The Age of Great Dreams*, “Specific events in the 1960s – like those associated with the civil rights and liberation movements, the failed war in Vietnam, and the chaotic violence that engulfed America’s cities – sprang from America’s changing cultural values, national economic and political system, and international role.”\(^{16}\)

In the midst of all this hope and turmoil, a pope died and with him an era ended in the Catholic Church that began with the sixteenth-century Council of Trent, whose pronouncements had largely guided the church hierarchy and millions of the world’s Catholics for over three

---

centuries. When Pope Pius XII died in 1958, the College of Cardinals converged on the Vatican City State, situated in Rome, to elect a new pope.\(^{17}\)

After three days of voting, they selected Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, who took the name John XXIII. At 77, he was considered by many to be a “transitional pope” who was unlikely to have a long pontificate. In this time of upheaval, perhaps they thought of Roncalli as providing a short-term period of stability while the world came back to some semblance of order. If so, they had miscalculated. They were correct that his pontificate would be short. Pope John XXIII died in 1963, less than six years into his pontificate. However, almost immediately upon election he began to use his educational background as a historian, along with his five decades of rich, diverse experience, to make the Church more responsive to the realities of the mid-twentieth century and to the lived experiences of its adherents. Temple University Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue Leonard Swidler describes Roncalli’s election and impact:

“Then came the death of Pius XII and the eventual election of Cardinal Angelo Roncalli – seen as a ‘do-nothing bench-warmer’ – in 1958 as Pope John XXIII (1958-63). Three months later in January 1959, he announced the calling of a new Ecumenical Council, Vatican II. This was the beginning of a revolution, the impact of which no one could have anticipated.”\(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\)“The Holy See is the universal government of the Catholic Church and operates from Vatican City State, a sovereign, independent territory. The Pope is the ruler of both Vatican City State and the Holy See. The Holy See, as the supreme body of government of the Catholic Church, is a sovereign juridical entity under international law.” [https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3819.htm](https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3819.htm). “The College of Cardinals is made up of all the cardinals of the Catholic Church. Cardinals are chosen by the Holy Father [pope] to serve as his principal assistants and advisers in the central administration of church affairs. Collectively, they form the College of Cardinals. Provisions regarding their selection, rank, roles, and prerogatives are detailed in Canons 349 to 359 of the Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church...Cardinals under the age of 80 elect the Pope when the Holy See becomes vacant; and are major administrators of church affairs, serving in one or more departments of the Roman Curia.” [http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/cardinals/the-college-of-cardinals/the-college-of-cardinals/](http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/cardinals/the-college-of-cardinals/the-college-of-cardinals/), accessed May 9, 2017. In 1958, 51 cardinals met in Vatican City to elect the new pope. Approximately one-third of them were Italian. Another third came from Europe, another 12 came from the Americas. The rest came from countries on every continent in ones and twos. (accessed May 23, 2017)

1.3 An Expected Bench Warmer Pope Surprises and Upends the Church

Dismissively labeled by some as simple and naïve, the vast majority of Catholics and non-Catholics knew then and have been aware since then, that something happened in the church – it happened with, thanks to, and through Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli.

Massimo Faggioli

*John XXIII: The Medicine of Mercy*

In his biography of Roncalli, *John XXIII: The Medicine of Mercy*, Massimo Faggioli gives us incisive insight into what shaped this pope and how he thought about his role within the history of the Catholic Church.\(^{19}\) Born Angelo Guiseppe Roncalli on November 25, 1881, the man who would become a transformational pope was a sharecropper’s son who grew up in a large, close family, in a poor farming village northeast of Milan.

Roncalli understood he was expected to be merely a transitional pontiff. He said as much in a letter he wrote three years after his election. “On October 28, 1958, when the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church chose me to the supreme responsibility for the government of the universal flock of Jesus Christ, at seventy-seven years of age, the belief spread that I was a pope of temporary transition,” Roncalli noted. He goes on to say, “Instead I am on the eve of the fourth year of my pontificate with the vision of a robust program to be carried out with the whole world watching and waiting.”\(^ {20}\)

Roncalli was able to envision such a “robust program” because he brought an abundance of uncommon interests, experiences, and skills to his pontificate that would make him an unusual pope. During much of the twentieth century’s global depressions and wars he worked outside of Italy, seeing first-hand the pain of poverty and the devastation of prejudice, while he learned the


\(^{20}\) Ibid., 108.
advantages of ecumenism. For most of his career, he had been a successful diplomat, representing the Vatican in unfamiliar places when tensions were high and where Catholics had not always made themselves welcome. By the time he became pope, Roncalli’s broad experiential knowledge gave him the ability to look critically at how the church was functioning within an emerging new world order that demanded a cosmopolitan and ecumenical approach to what was just and to whom such justice was owed.

Roncalli held a world view that was shaped in large part through his experiences in Bulgaria and Turkey, where he was the diplomatic representative of the Vatican during the global depression of the 1930s, and through the emotional and physical ravages of World War II. Living and working for decades in places where Catholicism was not the dominant religion and Western Europe did not dictate the culture, he learned to forge personal relationships across cultural and religious divides, relationships that were indispensable to his ability to play a part in finding solutions for people in deep distress during harrowing times. Roncalli partnered with leaders of the Eastern Orthodox Church to try to mitigate the privations of poverty in Bulgaria. In Turkey, he worked with Jewish religious and community leaders to help transport Jews fleeing from Hitler’s genocide. Through these works, he came to recognize the strength engendered by ecumenical endeavors and to appreciate the histories and cultures of the new nations emerging from colonial rule.\(^\text{21}\)

On becoming pope, John XXIII put that knowledge to work. He was particularly prescient in recognizing the future importance to Catholicism of the people of the emerging nations of what we now call the global South. Faggioli notes, “Under John XXIII bishops were appointed for Africa and Asia who were native to those areas…[becoming] more responsible and

\(^{21}\) Ibid., Chapter 3.
active in incarnating their Catholic identity in a local culture…the years 1959-1961 were crucial years for the globalization of the Catholic Church and the institution of national episcopates of native bishops in recently decolonized countries (Congo, Burundi, Vietnam, Korea and Indonesia).”

In *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*, sociologist Melissa J. Wilde indicates that during Vatican II, the African and Asian bishops coalesced with the North and South American and French bishops, forming a formidable liberal caucus that worked effectively together during deliberations and votes. The collaborative work of that caucus, and their lobbying of other potentially like-minded bishops, led to the approval of many of the changes that brought the church closer to its people and opened up so many possibilities for women and men religious, among them the Adrian Dominican sisters of Michigan.

1.4 *Vatican II Brings the Church into the Modern World*

Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one’s own conscience, to protection of privacy and to rightful freedom in matters religious too.

Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World
Promoting the Common Good (26)
Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council met in four sessions that started in late 1962 and concluded at the end of 1965. Each session lasted about 10 weeks, with meetings and advocacy ongoing during the interim periods. Through the four sessions, a total of 2,860 attended all or part of the Council sessions, with an average of 2,400 attendees at each session, over 2,000 of whom were

---

22 Ibid., 117.
voting bishops. The Council produced 16 documents, all signed by Pope Paul VI, who succeeded Pope John XXIII after his death in 1963, shortly after the first session ended. Four documents were “Constitutions,” the type of document that held the most institutional importance within the church and formed the direction that would frame the interpretation of the other 12. The subjects of the four constitutions include documents on church liturgy, on divine revelation, on the institutional church and, finally passed on the last day of the last session after considerable debate, on the church in the modern world.24

In his fortieth anniversary article on Vatican II and ecumenism, theologian Rev. Joseph Komonchak alludes to the original draft documents prepared by members of the Roman Curia and circulated prior to the opening of the council. Komonchak discusses their narrow, conservative nature, noting, “It is clear that the purpose of the original texts was to condemn errors in the modern world and even within the church.” Komonchak continues, “Of course, when the bishops finally gathered in Rome, Pope John called them to a broader and deeper vision of the church. Quite a different council unfolded than the one that had been planned.”25

In his 1966 introduction to The Documents of Vatican II, Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, the then archbishop of Baltimore, summed up the resultant work of Vatican II. “Taken as a whole,” he noted, “the documents [of Vatican II] are especially noteworthy for their concern with the poor, for the insistence on the unity of the human family and therefore on the wrongness of discrimination, for their repeated emphasis on the Christian’s duty to help build a just and

---

peaceful world, a duty which he must carry out in brotherly cooperation with all men of goodwill.”

In 2015, the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II, Massimo Faggioli reflected on its impact, “The constitution Gaudium et spes [sic] and the declaration Dignitatis humanae [sic] were crucial in disentangling Catholicism from its identification with European culture…” he wrote. “Politically, Vatican II provided the Church with a passport to speak much more credibly than in the past on behalf of the poor and in defense of human dignity wherever it is under attack.” It is this essential spirit of the outcomes of Vatican II that touched so many sisters of the Adrian Dominican Congregation. One of the sisters remembers her reaction to the words that she first read in 1968, during her preparation for the Adrian Dominican Chapter of Renewal, when the sisters began their discussions about the documents of Vatican II:

Those young men who were theologians…they really came up with all the documents, the document on justice for me is one of my favorites. I can get goose pimples thinking of it because it was the deepest, the most profound and the most available, available in the sense, we weren’t hearing about social justice in our lives, we were teaching kids, you know, but this beautiful document came out with really new words, not just the thoughts, but new words…and it was compelling…they clutched at you in a way that…you saw this miraculous change.

1.5 An Arduous Process of Change – The Sisters Hear the Call of Vatican II

Few institutions have changed so dramatically in so little time as American Women’s religious congregations…We had made one important choice: to enter religious life. From that point on, options for life’s directions were someone else’s responsibility. But that was soon to change. We had to learn that to truly ‘do’ theology, we, both individually and as congregations, had to enter into a much more demanding process…the impact of each of the documents of Vatican II was enormous.

---

26 Walter M. Abbott, ed., Gallagher, Joseph, Very Rev. Msgr. The Documents of Vatican II: With Notes and Comments by Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Authorities (New York: Guild Press, 1966): xvii. It is important to note that Abbott’s book includes all sixteen of the documents put forward from Vatican II, along with commentary on each from differing Catholic points of view and analysis by non-Catholics as well. Many Catholics, including Catholic sisters, used Abbott’s book almost as a textbook as they dove into the results of this unexpected, transforming Council.


28 Interview with Adrian Dominican sister, Adrian, MI, July 19, 2016.
Nineteen sixty eight was a time of turmoil and confusion in the United States, a year in which Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy were assassinated. It was a time when traditions in everything from politics to music to religion were being questioned, when people were on the streets demonstrating against a war many believed to be unnecessary and, most importantly, unjust. Millions of Americans had lost faith in their government and in their social institutions. Historian David Farber explains, “By 1968, the war in Vietnam had turned white-hot, black urban neighborhoods were on fire, and America’s political mainstream had started to rupture.”

This was also the year the Adrian Dominicans began their “Chapter of Renewal.” In this General Chapter meeting the sisters began the process of deciding how they would respond to the pronouncements of Vatican II. Gaudium et Spes, “On the Church in the Modern World,” in particular caught the attention of many of the sisters. In his introduction to Gaudium et Spes in The Documents of Vatican II, Rev. Donald R. Campion says, “This Constitution must rank as perhaps the most characteristic achievement of an essentially ‘pastoral’ Council…it remains primarily a synthesis of Catholic thinking as laid down in many sources but particularly in the vast corpus of papal statements on social issues.” It declared the church to be in and of the modern world, and called those who chose religious life to go out into the world and do justice.

This eighty-year-old congregation would begin a process of fundamental change. This process would take three years of rigorous, painful examination of every aspect of their life and work. The sisters would try to understand what governing themselves collegially meant, how

---

29 Farber, Age of Great Dreams, 189.
30 Abbott, Documents of Vatican II, 183.
each of them would decide what “doing justice” meant, whether teaching would continue to be the core of the service they would bring to their communities, whether they should have the freedom to choose to abandon the habit and dress like everyone else, and whether they could leave the convent and live with and like their neighbors in the communities they were serving. Essentially, they began a process of questioning every aspect of their theology, their ideology, and their daily lives, a process that is daunting to even consider as an individual, let alone undertake as members of a large community. Through this time of discussion and discernment, their congregation of 2400 would see 600 of their number leave. Never again would they have 2400 members.  

The Adrian Dominican congregation was not alone in this dramatic reduction in numbers. In fact, for traditional members of the Catholic laity, women religious and clergy, there were many unsettling outcomes of the reform movement born of Vatican II. For the first time parishioners were hearing their mass spoken in their native language. The priest was facing them during the service. The liturgy, with which parishioners were familiar from the time of their childhood, was changed. Even the offering of the Eucharist was different. In addition, the sister who taught their children for years might be suddenly gone or wearing the same kind of clothes as everyone else.

Most of the Adrian Dominican sisters had been teachers. For many of them, that was their unquestioned mission within the church. Like many other congregations of teaching sisters, the Adrian Dominicans decided sisters should now be free to choose their work, to apply for jobs for which they were qualified and that moved them as individuals and as sisters. The Adrian Dominicans had a long history of supporting education for their members. It may have taken

---

31 Ennis and Schulte interviews, April 28, 2017.
them nine or ten years to complete their degrees because they could only go to classes during the
summer when they were not teaching, but by the late 1970s it was unusual to find an Adrian
Dominican sister who had less than a master’s degree. Many of the Adrian Dominican sisters
stopped teaching and went on to other ministries. Two of the sisters highlighted in this project
chose to look outside of the institutional church for their work. One stayed on in the Catholic
schools.32

However, as sisters around the country left their congregations or their jobs in church
institutions, the resultant upheaval of the community structures of the Catholic Church was
substantial. Looking at Vatican II from the viewpoint of community impact, in his book Sisters,
Wall Street Journal investigative reporter John Fialka, outlined the devastation he found in some
Catholic institutions. “They [two Catholic psychologists] polled more than ten thousand
members of religious orders, nearly all women,” Fialka wrote. “What they found was that
between 1962 and 1992, orders of sisters shrunk by 42 percent. The orders shut down 23 percent
of their hospitals, 15 percent of their universities and colleges and 42 percent of their elementary
schools.”33

Still, for the majority of the Adrian Dominican sisters, this was a liberating time. Even
the arduous process they followed to understand, and then act on the pronouncements of Vatican
II, seemed well worth the effort. It was a process grounded in their values and for those who
remained in their congregation, it reaffirmed their faith as they understood it, forming an even
stronger foundation for their belief system. However, that did not make the process any less

32 Ennis and Schulte interviews, April 28, 2017; Priniski interview, July 16, 2016; and Maria Riley, interview by
author, Adrian, MI, April 27, 2016.
exhausting in which they forced themselves to consider again the meaning of their vows, to look squarely at their lives within that context, or as one sister described it, to face their truths.

By closely examining every aspect of how they conducted their daily lives, they confronted how they felt about some of the decisions that had always been made for them and, for some of them, decisions that directly affected their sense of identity as sisters and as human beings. A prime example was their names. When they entered the congregation, Mother Gerald gave them new names. They could put forward three options and she would make the final choice. After Vatican II, when they were given the option, almost every sister chose to return to the name given her by her family and with which she was baptized.

For the first time, the sisters were also permitted to decide how they would dress. The congregation first decided they would adopt a modified habit with a shorter skirt and less complicated sleeves and head-gear. The following year, they decided to open up the option of regular secular clothes. This presented an interesting conundrum for many of the sisters who had not purchased clothes for decades and had no idea what to buy or where to buy it. Further, shedding the habit meant much more than just taking off a dress. For many of the sisters, as well as clergy and the laity, the habit was an important part of what defined these women as sisters. For others, it was an outmoded form of dress that could serve the purpose of separating them from the people they served, a separation that some in the clergy or the laity might desire, but many sisters did not. Sr. Mary Ann Ennis remembers a student commenting on her abandoning the habit asking, “but how will we know who you are?” Another child responded for the sister,

---

34 The head of the congregation, responsible for budget, carrying out policy and for the general good and welfare of the congregation. The title of the elected leader of the congregation changed to “prioress” in the 1970s.
35 Ennis and Schulte interviews, April 28, 2017.
“You can tell by her face, dummy.” There is a clear element of indignation when Ennis tells this story. “I am more than the clothes I wear,” she said.36

After Vatican II, for all the attendant upheaval and dislocation within the church and among the sisters, many local, national, and international communities and their social services and social justice organizations benefited greatly from the presence of the sisters. They frequently brought with them a fresh viewpoint arising from their faith and deeply rooted in their values. From local civil rights movements to international feminism, to the Catholic schools where some decided to continue to teach, the sisters infused new energy and commitment into the institutions, causes, and communities they chose to join. John Feister, who worked with Mary Priniski in the South in the 1980s, remembers that some of the local leaders called many of the sisters who came in “parachute sisters” because they suddenly arrived in the South from places all over the US. “They would come into the area and get to work doing whatever was needed,” he recalled. “But, they had a different attitude toward the work. They were called to do this work, it was part of their faith.”37

Through three years of getting to know many of the Adrian Dominican sisters and learning about their history and their work, I have come to believe they have been able to make change work for them in ways the rest of our society has not and perhaps cannot. In part because of the strongly held values they have developed and maintained through lifetimes of deep examination and constant thought and discussion, most of them appear to be secure in who they are and what they believe. They faced the changes coming at them from Vatican II in the same way they learned about their vocation, through a process of study and deep self-assessment, made possible because they were doing it together.

36 Ibid.
37 John Feister, interview by author, Cincinnati, OH. June 3, 2017.
They are candid about the process, saying it was not easy to question so much of the fabric of their lives. Through that three-year process in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of their number came to the conclusion that, for multiple reasons, the life of a Dominican sister was no longer what they wanted. For the approximately 1800 who stayed, their sisterhood remained strong, as it does today. They appear to live the Catholic Social Teaching of the shared common good. That is not to say that they get along in blissful peace. It is a stronger bond than that.

While disagreements seem to erupt over large and small issues, they never question their ultimate obligation to each other.

It is most apparent as they face a new set of challenges. As of June 2017, their average age is 80 and few sisters are coming in. Of those women who are entering the congregation now, only one was born in the United States and she is also the only current novice who is not a woman of color. In both of these circumstances – an aging population buoyed up by new members who augur a changing demographic – the congregation once again mirrors the changes in our American society. When I asked some of the older sisters what they thought about that and about the future of their congregation, they all said almost exactly the same thing: religious life will be what the next generation of sisters make it, and it will be good.

I believe they have much to teach us that they have learned through their lived experience. As a secular society, we are unlikely to take on all of their values, nor would most of us be willing to take on their simplified lifestyle. However, there is reason to believe we are entering a time in which we will all come together as a species or we will fail as a species. As a world community, regardless of where one lives or one’s socio-economic status, we are facing dangers that threaten everyone and our posterity. While it may be tempting for psychological as
well as fiscal reasons to deny that climate change exists, we cannot deny flooding along our river banks and in our coastal areas or the baking heat killing vital crops.

Unlike those who choose to turn away from this reality, the Adrian Dominicans have chosen to accept and react to global warming. They have ordered a sustainability evaluation of their Adrian campus and are working on an action plan. Some are engaged in evaluating their personal carbon footprint and reducing it in accordance with goals they have set for themselves. If they do not meet those goals, they personally pay into a fund to help ministries in countries most immediately affected by global warming. To address this compelling, transformative challenge that will require world community action, might we be able to take on the sisters’ methods of dealing with change? Could the world community do the hard, painful work of understanding what transformations are happening; face honestly what the future could look like in the presence of some forces we cannot control; let each decide for themselves how they want to move forward personally; and then come together to figure out how we envision and create a decent life under new circumstances, and how we share available resources considering the requirements for the common good? When asked how they are facing so much change once again, especially the challenge of being with and for each other as so many are dying, Mary Ann Ennis says, “But we are doing it together.”

Because so many of the sisters who came into the congregation prior to 1962 are still alive and many are living at the motherhouse in Adrian, Michigan, oral histories have formed the nexus of my work on this project. In addition to the three women whose stories provide the living examples of how the sisters utilized their new-found freedom to choose how they would carry out their mission, I have also interviewed:
• Members of the leadership in the late 1960s and early 1970s – the time when the sisters were dealing with the pronouncements of Vatican II, two sisters who act as chaplains for the congregation and are charged with providing spiritual comfort to the sisters who are dying and with ensuring that their final wishes are carried out completely as to how they die and how they are buried

• Sisters who experienced the massive changes, but are not the primary figures in this project

• New sisters coming into the congregation

• People outside of the congregation who worked with the three sisters who are the focus of individual chapters

Like other practitioners of oral history, I started this work with a particular hypothesis in mind. Considering the centrality of Pope John XXIII, I thought I would be looking at the role in change of one major player, determined to move forward with a risky idea. That hypothesis changed as I conducted interviews with the sisters and began to better understand their agency in the lives they created for themselves as individuals and as members of a family of women who believe in and practice Catholic Social Teaching.

This metamorphic process appears to be relatively commonplace in the experience of oral historians. In her book on oral history methodology, historian Valerie Raleigh Yow points out, “One advantage in using qualitative methodology is that, because the researcher does not adhere to an unchangeable testing instrument, he or she is open to recording discussion on the informants’ choice of topics. In this way, the researcher learns new things not in the original
hypothesis – in fact, many qualitative researchers do not form hypotheses at the beginning of the research.”

Fortunately, each of the organizations with which Maria Riley and Mary Priniski were associated have forwarded considerable material to, respectively, the Notre Dame University archives for the Center of Concern, and Catholic University’s archives for the Catholic Committee of the South. As noted in this introduction and in the bibliography for this project, there is a rich historiography on the Second Vatican Council and on the history and work of American Catholics.

1.6 Chapter Outlines

This project is divided into this introduction, three chapters and an epilogue and conclusion. Each of the three chapters are devoted to the story of one of the Adrian Dominican sisters: their personal life events; the type of work they chose to do before and after Vatican II; why they chose to do it; what was happening contemporaneously in, and had an impact upon, their chosen profession; what they think about the future of the congregation and American society. The epilogue goes into the current situation for the congregation.

The first chapter takes up the life and work of Maria Riley, O.P., Ph.D. Dr. Riley was born in 1933, and entered the congregation in 1951. Riley experienced the changes wrought by the work of the bishops of Vatican II. She came into the congregation with one year of college and was given her parents’ blessing to enter the congregation only after she promised to finish her education. Her first work as an Adrian Dominican sister was as a teacher in a Catholic elementary school. While Riley was teaching, she went on to get her bachelor’s degree in

---

theology and her doctorate in English literature. In 1980, she joined the staff of the Center of Concern, from which she forged a notable career as an advocate for women’s causes, working around the world to help improve the social, political, and economic status of women, particularly women of the “Third World.”

Peter Anthony Schulte, O.P., M.Ed., is the subject of the second chapter. Sr. Peter Anthony Schulte is 76 years old. She entered the congregation in 1959. While there were many ideas from Vatican II that Schulte accepted and implemented, she chose not to revert back to the name her family gave her. After the congregation’s decision to permit sisters to find occupations outside of teaching and nursing, Schulte decided to continue her career as a teacher within the Catholic system. She retired at the age of 72, after a 52-year career as a teacher. In 1972, she was teaching, using state-of-the-art methodology at St. Vincent de Paul School in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. The school was using an Individually Guided Education method of teaching to which Schulte was totally committed and about which she was very excited. Schulte is a firm believer that educators have to meet the students where they are and move them forward from there. Her colleague at St. Vincent de Paul, John Newbauer, pointed to phenomenal success, moving students who were having difficulties reading two and three grade levels in a single school year. When the superintendent in charge of her school demanded that she and her colleagues continue to wear the habit, 22 sisters, including Schulte, walked away from that school despite their deep regard for their students, their respect for their colleagues, and their excitement about the results they were seeing from the experimental methods they were using.

Mary Priniski, O.P., Ph.D., is the subject of the third chapter. Dr. Priniski was born in 1949. She entered the congregation in 1968, the year the Chapter of Renewal began for the Adrian Dominicans. Therefore, Priniski’s experiences were very different from that of Riley or
Schulte. Still, during her first years she found a typical pre-Vatican II assignment. However, in 1979, Priniski became directly involved in the cause of social justice and has devoted her life ever since to work on behalf of civil rights and worker’s rights. Committed to “walking with” the people in the community in which she lives and works, Priniski has been particularly astute at bringing people working for social justice into collaboration. She is now the director of Gathering for Mission, a five-year project to bring the voice and vision of Pope Francis to the parishes.

The epilogue and conclusion looks at the current changes the Adrian Dominican Congregation is going through. It does this through the eyes of the two sister chaplains who are tending to the sick and dying and making certain, to the extent possible, that their wishes are carried out during their last days and for their burial. They are Srs. Mary Ann Ennis and Mary Rae Waller. It is important to also include the viewpoint of the younger entrants into the congregation, especially the women of color who will make up an emerging multi-racial, multi-ethnic congregation. Through two of their number, the younger women in the congregation will have their say in this project as well.

Once again, the trajectory of the congregation aligns with the trajectory of American society generally. However, the response is much different from what we have seen in our American political and social discourse of late. Instead of trying to turn back the clock, in their most recent General Chapter, which took place in 2016, the sisters squarely addressed the issues facing them and published the resultant “…a great hope in common.” It says of the vision, “We Dominican Preachers of Adrian, impelled by the Gospel and outraged by the injustices of our day seek truth; make peace; reverence life.” It goes on:
• Rooted in the Gospel, we recognize our own spiritual longings and those of the world. We commit to deepen our spirituality and to engage with others in prayer and presence in order to witness to the mystery of God in our midst.

• Recognizing the violence against Earth community that places our common home in dire jeopardy and intensifies the suffering of people on the margins, future generations and all creation, we will sacrifice to mitigate significantly our impact on climate change and ecological degradation.

• Recognizing that racism, violence and intolerance of diversity fuel marginalization, we pledge our lives, money and other resources to facilitate and participate in creating resilient communities with people who are relegated to the margins.

• Rooted in the joy of the Gospel, we will embrace and nurture our rich diversity, commit ourselves to deepening our relationships with one another, invite others to vowed and Associate life.

• Stirred by the Wisdom of God and rooted in our contemplative prayer, communal study and life in community, we challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation, and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others and ravage Earth.  

The older sisters look toward a future they will not see. While they assume it will be different from the time they knew, they do not face their time left, or the future of the congregation, with anger and fear. They are confident in the generosity and spiritual depth of the next generation of sisters in whom they place their hopes. However, they are not just

39 Enactments of the General Chapter of 2016 of the Adrian Dominican Congregation, “…a great hope in common,” published by the Adrian Dominican Sisters, Adrian, MI, 2016.
counting on serendipity. They are joining with those younger sisters in examining their own institutional weaknesses. They are mentoring the next generation and they are trying their best to leave a healthy environment, in every respect, for the sisters coming into the congregation. Most important, they are, as always, doing it together.

2 MARIA RILEY, O.P., PH.D.

A Force for Transformation – Church and Society

When I think through the evolution to where we are now, at first the women’s struggle was about women’s rights: economic rights, personal rights, spiritual rights, physical rights. But, as you follow the whole evolution of the women’s movement, by the time of Beijing, the movement had shifted. It wasn’t so much about women’s fight, because many of those battles had been opened up. It was about the women’s agenda for the world, which to me was worth all those years of struggle. The women’s movement is not about getting equality within a destructive system, it’s about transforming the system.

Maria Riley

Maria Riley has dedicated her life to ensuring the voices of women are heard by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, by the leaders of the United States and other governments, by intergovernmental organizations like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, and by each other through discernment and in solidarity. She has founded networks, written books and monographs, created programs, and presented at countless conferences and workshops as she advocated for strengthening the role of women in almost every relevant institution of secular and religious society. During those decades of activism, Riley has been an important agent of change for women and the poor in the Catholic Church, in the United States and other countries around

---

40 This refers to the UN’s “Fourth World Conference on Women” in Beijing in 1995.
the world, and in her own congregation. After more than 50 years of being an unstoppable activist for the marginalized of society, Riley is now retired and living in the motherhouse of the Adrian Dominican Congregation, which she entered in 1951.

Through times of invigorating advances and enervating setbacks, Riley was animated by her absolute belief that social and economic justice as she understood it, must guide society. Riley’s worldview is informed by her belief in Catholic Social Teaching and Liberation Theology. Her ideal world is one in which the stranger is welcomed, where everyone has the opportunity to lead a life free from hunger, discrimination, and violence, a life that offers an opportunity for peace and contentment. Unlike many who might espouse such a philosophy, she does not sit quietly dreaming of utopia. Instead Riley has used every talent she possesses toward making that world system a reality, and she possesses a formidable cache of talents.

While Riley says, “I was born to be a feminist,” that life path was not always apparent. At 18, Riley made a life-changing decision – to enter the Adrian Dominican Congregation, which at that time was far from being a bastion of feminist activity.41

2.1 Formation as a Woman Religious and a Social Activist

Each woman religious dedicated her life to Christ and the Gospels, a commitment that could be interpreted as a radical call to egalitarianism, justice and peace. For some sisters, like Maria Riley, such an interpretation led to a holistic concept of social justice ministry committed to combatting sexism, poverty, racism, classism, and environmental exploitation.

Mary J. Henold
*Catholic and Feminist*

Maria Riley entered the Adrian Dominican Congregation 11 years before the first session of the Second Vatican Council and 17 years before the Adrians held their Chapter of Renewal to

---

41 Maria Riley, O.P., Ph.D., interview by author, Adrian MI, October 7, 2016.
begin their process of assimilating the ideas of Vatican II into their lives as individuals and as a community. For those 17 years, Riley was assigned a new name, Sr. Maria Amabilis. She wore the habit, a thirteenth-century dress with long flowing sleeves held up by a series of perfectly placed, gold safety pins. She was restricted in where she could live, what work she could do (teaching), and on what she could spend her time. After the Chapter of Renewal, she would resume using Riley, shed the habit, be elected as a leader of her congregation and become an international champion of women’s rights, inside and outside of the church. Vatican II would change her life and, through her, impact thousands of women around the world. Women religious and women with other, or no, religious ties would benefit from her advocacy for economic and social equality. She would also become, and remains, a strong, compelling voice for women of faith seeking equal treatment within the male hierarchy of the Catholic Church.\(^{42}\)

Born in 1933, in Crystal Lake, Illinois, Riley was the youngest of eight children. She claims she got her first feminist training from dealing with her six older brothers. Describing her growing up, Riley says, “I grew up as an Irish Catholic. We were all Democrats. We all cheered for Notre Dame, that was the package.”\(^{43}\)

Riley made her decision to enter the Adrian Dominican Congregation while she was completing her first year of study at Barry College (now Barry University), one of two universities sponsored by the Adrian Dominicans. When Riley entered the Congregation, transforming the Catholic Church was not her motivation. As with most young women not yet out of their teens, she was just trying to determine what she wanted out of the years that lay before her. Thinking back on her reasons for entering, Riley reflects, “I had a sense that I wanted to do something significant with my life, and when I was growing up there was – get

\(^{42}\) Riley interview, April 28, 2016.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.
married, be a nurse or enter the convent. I didn’t particularly want to get married. I had no
desire to be a nurse. So, that left going to the convent – but I really felt called to the life.”

Through the first twenty years of her life as an Adrian Dominican sister, Riley would
experience turmoil within the church that would induce one in four of the members of her
congregation to leave. In American society, the African-American community would rise up and
fight back against a century of segregation that was built on centuries of slavery. The courage,
determination, and successes of the foot soldiers of that movement, frequently facing violent
pushback from local authorities, encouraged millions of women to join together in a second
wave feminist movement to challenge gender inequalities and create new possibilities for women
across society. These struggles would play out against the backdrop of what many considered an
unjust war foisted by the United States on the Vietnamese people, who many believed were not a
danger to our country. Adding to the turmoil of the time, a disgraced president would be forced
to resign for abuses of power and a disillusioned public would become skeptical of government
and politics. As a result, Americans would become deeply divided over the meaning of the long
Sixties as a time of change or a time of discord. “The upheavals of the 1960s etched a vivid trail
of anger and memory,” wrote historian Daniel T. Rogers, “but for all the shock waves they set
off in society and culture, and for all the ways in which their slogans could be found lodged in
incongruously diverse places in later years, the social movements of the 1960s did not, in the
end, set the forms into which the shaken pieces would be recast.”

Around the world, the newly independent countries of the global South were also rising
up after centuries of colonization and trying to gain economic, as well as political sovereignty.

---

44 Ibid.
2011), Kindle edition location 49
They would call themselves a “Third World,” determined to walk on a nonaligned path in a global order seemingly divided between the US-led “First World” and the Soviet-led “Second World.”

The resulting poverty and political upheaval was a cause for concern for theologians as well as politicians and sociologists. Speaking of the 1955 Bandung Conference of “Third World” countries, Peruvian Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez discussed the intention and the result of the conference, “facing two developed worlds, the capitalist and the socialist…this conference marked the beginning of a policy which was supposed to lead out of this state of affairs. Although the deeds that followed did not always correspond to the expectations aroused, Bandung nevertheless signaled a deepened awareness of the fact of underdevelopment and a proclamation of its unacceptability.”

Over the next fifty years, Maria Riley, grounding much of her work in Catholic Social Teaching, would be a vibrant voice of conscience and fairness in many of these national and international social movements. However, in 1951, she was just a young woman entering a life very different from the one she had known.

Upon being welcomed into the Adrian Dominican Congregation, Riley would begin approximately seven years of study and discernment as she went through various stages of commitment, deciding whether she would go forward with a life in the church as a woman religious. Having had a year of college before entering, Riley was immediately given a teaching assignment in a Catholic school in Detroit. Riley had promised her father she would complete her education and the leadership encouraged her to do so, as they did with all the members of the congregation. Eventually, with her English literature doctorate in hand, she would return to...

---

Barry College as a professor. However, like all the teaching sisters in congregations throughout the US, Riley would complete her education while she was teaching in Catholic schools. Summers were the time reserved for sisters’ continuing education.47

These were times when sisters did what they were told. Even for someone as strong willed and self-possessed as Maria Riley, Mother Gerald, the superior of the congregation for over three decades, was not to be crossed. Early in Riley’s teaching career, she was commandeered to be a music teacher. Despite first her insistence, and then her pleading that she knew nothing about music, she could not convince Mother Gerald that she had no musical ability, couldn’t play any instrument, couldn’t even sing. Mother Gerald insisted Riley played the trumpet, convinced she heard her do so. As it happens, Mother Gerald had Riley confused with another sister who had indeed played the trumpet when Mother Gerald was in attendance. Riley points out that the other sister was taller, thinner, and blonder than the shorter, medium built, darker haired Riley, who had never so much as held a trumpet in her life. All those arguments notwithstanding, Riley was a music teacher for one year until she was finally able to convince Mother Gerald she didn’t play the trumpet. As Riley said, “I don’t know how to do that, was not a phrase in our vocabulary.”48

By the mid-1970s, Riley was acting on the new sense of liberation that sisters were experiencing in their work and in their relationship to the church. She had been elected as one of four provincials (leaders) for the congregation and was engaged in working with the US bishops. She wanted to be involved in the bicentennial celebration, to make sure the greater church, including its laity, had staked out a role for itself in the upcoming big events. She saw her work with the bishops as an avenue to accomplish that.

47 Riley, interview, October 7, 2016.
48 Riley, interview, April 28, 2016.
2.2 A Bicentennial Celebration Giving Voice to Laity, Bishops Shut it Down

Basically, it was just an idea when I joined the US Bishops Conference…It had no shape. There was going to be some celebration of the 200 years of American history and the church should do something. That was as far as it had gone.

Maria Riley

It did not take long for Maria Riley to take action on this idea and to give it shape, a shape that shook things up, as was to be expected in a project of Riley’s. During the summer of 1974, still serving her term as a provincial, Riley decided to take an informal, short sabbatical and spend the summer in Washington, DC. As part of her work with the then National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), Riley was trying to devise a plan for the church to take part in the forthcoming celebration of the US bicentennial.

Since she was in Washington, Riley decided to drop in on the US Bicentennial Commission office and find Frank Butler, who was in charge of the celebration. “I had gone up to Washington and I went to the office that was running the bicentennial celebration,” she remembered. “I walked in and introduced myself – I’m Sr. Maria Riley.” Riley continued relating the story of her meeting: “The young man says, ‘I was taught by Adrian Dominicans in Florida.’ He continued, ‘I lost track of my fourth-grade teacher whose name was Sr. Maria Amabilis.’ I’m right here, I said. That, of course, helped me get the position I was trying to get to work on the bicentennial.” Maria Amabilis was Riley’s name as given her when she was received into the congregation. After Vatican II, when the sisters were able to choose whether to keep the name they were given at reception or go back to their given or family name, she chose Maria Riley. In addition, by the mid-1970s most of the Adrian Dominican sisters, including Riley, were out of the habit, which would have made it doubly difficult for Butler to recognize

---

49 Now the US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).
her after probably close to 20 years. Riley pointed out that amabilis loosely translated means loveable and, laughing, told the story of one of her students who asked her if she got that name because she was lovable or because they hoped she would be.⁵⁰

Riley called Sr. Jeanne O’Laughlin, an Adrian who she knew she could rely on to be a valuable partner in the bicentennial project, and the two created, planned, and implemented “Call to Action Conference 1976,” an ambitious program that took almost two years in its implementation. Under the direction of John Cardinal Deardon of Detroit, the program involved every parish in the United States in discussion on eight issues, with specific topics assigned to each issue. The issues chosen were: church, nationhood, family, personhood, neighborhood, humankind, ethnicity and race, and work. At the end of the process, the bishops had received over 800,000 responses asking for the bishops’ attention to various aspects of these issues. Riley and O’Laughlin compiled a 42-page report summarizing the results of the local discussions and the parishioners’ recommendations to the bishops from which this information on the details of the project was obtained. In the final report, recommendations included a call for “the local church” to be involved in the selection of bishops and pastors; that the bishops develop structures to “promote the full participation of women in the life and ministry of the Church”; that “all sexist language and imagery be eliminated from all official church documents”; that all diocesan offices take “positive action to understand and affirm the values of cultural, ethnic and racial diversity”; and many more pages of similar requests.⁵¹

According to James Hug, S.J., “the thing that was stunning was that it was participatory. The lay people were participating…It dealt with all the hot button issues of the mid-seventies.

⁵⁰ Riley interview, October 7, 2016.
except abortion.” As Riley tells it, the bishops found the results pretty stunning as well. “The whole thing got tabled because the lay people who sat down with the bishops and crafted their plans were so far ahead of their [the bishops’] imagination – and the conclusions were sent to the bishops’ conference and the whole thing was tabled because the document had divorce and remarriage, and had ordination of women – and that was the end of it.”

For the remainder of her career, Riley would continue to write and speak, to run workshops and conferences, on these hot button issues. But, as the 1970s was coming to a close, Riley’s term as a co-provincial was also ending. Riley needed a job. She would find it in a three-decade partnership with the team at the Center of Concern (COC). Her work at the COC would also include a more than twenty-year partnership with James Hug, a partnership that had a significant impact on women and their families forced to live in poverty by a geopolitical and economic system that disproportionately affected families in the global South, but also kept tens of millions of Americans in poverty as well.

2.3 Riley Joins the COC – Makes Their Social Justice Struggle Her Own

How are we going to be in a world of destitution and injustice? There can only be one answer: we can be followers of Jesus and true Christians only by making common cause with the poor and working out the gospel of liberation. Trade union struggles, battles for land and for the territories belonging to Amer-Indians, the fight for human rights and all other forms of commitment always pose the same question: What part is Christianity playing in motivating and carrying on the process of liberating the oppressed?

Leonardo and Clodovis Boff
*Introducing Liberation Theology*

Founded in 1971, the Center of Concern was started as a joint project of the then National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) and the

---

52 James Hug, S.J., interview by author, Adrian, MI, October 7, 2016.
53 Riley, interview, October 7, 2016
Society of Jesus – the Jesuits. In its early years, the COC was conceived as an organization that could work with the United Nations committees and the Catholic Church, acting as a liaison organization, interpreting policies back and forth between them and to the Catholic laity.

Nineteen seventy one was the year the World Synod of Bishops published *Justice in the World*, the philosophical premise of which formed the core purpose and goals of the Center of Concern, “We see in the world a set of injustices which constitute the nucleus of today’s problems and whose solution requires the undertaking of tasks and functions in every sector of society and even on the level of the global society,” the bishops said. “We must be prepared to take on new functions and new duties...if justice is really to be put into practice. Our action is to be directed above all at those people and nations which because of various forms of oppression and because of the present character of our society are silent, indeed voiceless, victims of injustice.”

The Center of Concern, still operating in Washington, DC, has engaged in short-term and long-term projects focused on providing a decent life for those living on the economic and social margins around the world. In 1996, at its twenty-fifth anniversary, then executive director James Hug reflected on the mission and the work of COC: “The fundamental mission has remained the same and solid...and that’s to help the U.S. church embrace the mission of the Gospel call for justice.” He continued, “During its first decade, the Center focused on U.N. issues, then in the ‘80s on the U.S. bishops’ pastoral letters. Now,” said Hug, “the Center’s global connections have brought it full circle to the U.N.’s recent conferences on social development, women and human settlements.”

---

In an article on COC’s fortieth anniversary, Richard McBrien delineated some of the projects that had made a significant difference to people over the years: Education for Justice, Global Women’s Project, Rethinking Bretton Woods Project, and the Ecology and Development Project. McBrien led into the list by saying, “Over these four decades The Center of Concern has been a prophetic voice pointing to the root causes of hunger, economic and social injustice and human rights violations, while working to transform them.”^56 While it continues with that mission today, the work of the COC team of the 1980s and 1990s was extraordinary. The COC was influential in a series of pastoral letters from the bishops on a host of social justice issues and was a key player in multiple United Nations conferences on women and on economic development, in which Maria Riley held a pivotal role. The Center of Concern was a consistent voice for social and economic justice with members of the US Congress, with the institutional church and in international forums for the poor and the marginalized.

For Riley, it offered a perfect home for her to put into action her deepening feminist beliefs and her dedication to a just society. Through the COC, Riley followed the actions of and reported on, four of the five UN conferences on the Decade of Women (1975-1985). During the 1980s, Riley produced a number of programs aimed at increasing the role of women in the church and made presentations on feminism and faith to organizations around the world. Through the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, Riley and James Hug formed a partnership that brought a new dynamism to the COC, bringing it into the heady world of international coalition building, United Nations lobbying, and creating a barrier breaking women’s trade network that still exists today. Throughout her tenure at COC, Riley was a recognized feminist

---

voice for women of faith. However, in 1979, fresh off her disappointing experience with the bishops’ bicentennial project, Riley was focused on changing the roles of women in the church.

2.4 A Catholic Feminist Works to Empower Women in Church and Society

The purpose of beginning a feminist revision of Catholic social thought is multiple. It could provide Catholic women and men with a perspective to bring to the wider feminist dialogue for social change. This perspective has been notably lacking within the feminist dialogue. It will also provide a corrective and enrichment of Catholic social thought by including the dimension of gender. Finally, a feminist-revised Catholic social ethic could be a powerful ally in women’s struggle for human liberation.

Maria Riley

_Transforming Feminism_

Commenting on the impact of the changes in the church and society on Catholic feminists, historian Mary Henold explains, “The origins of Catholic feminism are complex, and they include exposure to feminist ideas outside of Catholic culture, but evidence suggests that faith and the changing nature of Catholicism at midcentury had an equal if not more significant impact.” For Riley, who began her feminist work during the more liberal period when the impact of Vatican II was strongest, her Catholic identity mingled inextricably with her identity as a woman and a social justice activist. She was relentless in attempting to make those identities synergistic, rather than mutually exclusive. The Center of Concern was developing a reputation for its social justice work. It seemed an ideal niche from which to put her ideas into action, but Riley’s first interaction about a position with COC was not promising.

Encouraged by friends and colleagues to apply for a position at the COC, Riley sent a resume to then Executive Director Peter Henriot, S.J. When he called her in for an interview,

---


58 Center of Concern Records (COC), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556, Maria Riley, CCOC 1993-072, Box: Maria Riley, Letter from Riley to Peter Henriot, S.J., May 12, 1978.
theirs was an inauspicious beginning. Henriot told her he was very interested in what she was suggesting for the COC, but he was looking for an African-American economist. Being neither African-American nor an economist, Riley was, as she expressed it, “very angry.”

For his part Henriot was extremely impressed, and continued to reflect on Riley’s interests, capabilities, and suggestions. In a letter to Riley dated November 20, 1978, Henriot said:

I hope to have a chance to speak with you personally at the WOC [Women’s Ordination Conference] meeting…Your visit with us was really enjoyable…But more than that, it really helped us clarify some of the thinking we have been doing recently about the needs of the staff…we feel the need for some strong input regarding analysis and some creative pulling of us in possible new directions. Halfway through the conversation, I began to realize that besides the many other abilities which you have and strengths which you would bring the CENTER, you really were also addressing these very needs…So we decided that we should not continue the search any further until we had made a direct invitation to you to join us.

At that conference, Riley encountered one of the COC staff, who told her Henriot was looking for her. Riley replied, “Well he can just keep looking. Anyway, he did find me and he offered me the job.” Riley told him she would think about it. “You realize,” she explains, “I really wanted that job, but I was so angry, I thought – I’m not going to give into this guy…but, of course, I wanted it. So, I ran into him the next day and I said yes, that I would take the job.”

Hug commented, “She was establishing her fighting stance for the next thirty years.”

That began Riley’s thirty years as a religious, national and international feminist activist.

Riley credits one of her Florida State University professors with her feminist awakening:

Each of us has a story of feminist conversion to tell. Mine begins back in 1969 in the office of a university professor. I was a graduate student…I also had the rather dubious distinction of being the only nun in the English Department. I was just finishing a review of my dissertation topic when the professor…declared in

59 Riley, interview, April 28, 2016.
60 Center of Concern Records (COC), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556, Maria Riley, CCOC 1993-072, Box Maria Riley 1981-1987, Folder Maria Riley, Letter to Maria Riley from Peter Henriot, November 20, 1978. Riley’s letter to Henriot is in the same folder.
61 Riley and Hug interview, October 7, 2016.
his typically avuncular manner, ‘You are the only woman in the English Department I don’t mind working with.’ For a few precious moments… I thought maybe it was because I was the smartest…the professor continued, ‘You won’t waste your education by getting married and having children.’ I left his office angry, confused, and convinced that I had just encountered something that was extremely unfair and fundamentally wrong.62

Riley’s experience in Adrian Dominican leadership continued her education in the difficulties women faced in the professional world. As the leader of a group of women working in a male hierarchy, Riley found herself constantly having to negotiate with the diocesan clergy. “In discussions with pastors and bishops concerning just salaries for sisters, choice of clothing, residence, work, or the desire of the women to use their skills and talent,” she recalled. “I discovered among the clergy and hierarchy the unexamined presumption that they had the right to make these decisions for the individual women and the communities.”63

At COC, Riley found a way to address these problems directly. By 1981, she was deeply involved in “Women Moving Church,” a four-phase COC project that culminated with a conference that included over 200 women and 25 men to share their experiences as and for women in the church as they reflected on the role of women in Catholic life. In the COC bulletin, Riley summed up her objectives for the program: “The goal was empowerment – the empowerment of women as Church to continue the work of justice: justice not only for women in the Church but also justice for all persons.”64

“Women Moving Church” was a multi-dimensional COC program for which Riley took the lead. Describing the program in a letter recruiting participants, Riley outlines the four phases of the program: 1) 400 people from a broad spectrum of the church to share their insights and

62 Riley, Transforming Feminism, 1.
63 Ibid., 2.
64 Center of Concern Records (COC), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556, Maria Riley, CCOC 1998-122, Box:4/5, Folder: Women Moving Church, “Women Moving Church: From Assessment to Empowerment,” Center Focus, no. 45 (September 1981): 5-6.
experiences in writing; 2) 10 reflectors/responders to analyze the material from the 400; 3) the conference of approximately 150 people to dialogue with the reflectors/responders; and 4) publish and circulate the proceedings of the conference to reach a wider audience. In subsequent correspondence the popular pull of the program is clear. In addition to having over 225 attendees, they reached out to 450 people and 130 papers were received. In describing the design of the conference, Riley says, “we have designed the conference which focuses on women as church, spirituality for women for the 80s, changing church structures, and identification/creation of resources for empowerment.”

Still, as Riley points out, “A lot of the bishops wouldn’t touch it…there was only one bishop who was willing to come to it, [Maurice John] Dingman of Des Moines…it wasn’t even the ordination of women. It was just the role of women.”

In the 1980s and ‘90s, as the church reverted to a more conservative philosophy with regard to the role of women in the church during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, COC’s social transformation work became both their fame with like-minded organizations and their infamy with more conservative Catholic organizations and bishops. One of many critiques of the COC’s work during this period was written and published by Frank Morriss, then a prominent Catholic journalist, writer, and teacher whose obituary described him as “a defender of the faith.” Morriss was direct in his criticism that appears in 1982 in his conservative Catholic publication, The Wanderer. Writing about a meeting at which Riley discussed the pastoral letter that was being drafted on women in the church, Morriss called the “things” the new American Church practices “hypocrisy”; he went on to single out Riley as one of the culprits. “Some talks by Religious at the meeting gave an idea of just what ideas the Bishops will be asked to endorse, Sr.

---

65 Center of Concern Records (COC), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556, CCOC-40, Box: Maria Riley, 1981-1987, Folder: UMC Matrices – Pre-conference, Phase I letters, Diann Neu and Maria Riley, first letter addressed to “Dear Friend,” dated December 7, 1980; second letter addressed to conference participants as: “Spring greetings from gorgeous blossoming, DC, dated May 7, 1981.

66 Riley, interview, October 7, 2016.
Maria Riley, O.P., for example, said, ‘In the sense that we are caught in structures that are not fully human, we must be liberated,’” he wrote.  Even given the tone of Morriss’s criticism, Riley was probably pleased that her ideas were being disseminated to an audience yet to be persuaded.

Speaking for herself and James Hug, Riley said, “We think Catholic Social Teaching is central to the faith.” The centrality of Liberation Theology and their reading of Catholic Social Teaching as emphasizing a call to social justice guided the activities of the COC from the 1970s through the 1990s. Riley continued, “Feminism and Catholic Social Teaching reinforce one another. I think feminism and the emphasis on equality…is not very strong in traditional Catholic Social Teaching…that is what women bring to Catholic Social Teaching, but what Catholic Social Teaching brings to women is a wider scope of what faith is all about. So, it’s mutual enrichment.”

Riley realized she was involved in a life-long commitment to societal transformation, to being open to new ideas that changed her mission as needs arose, essentially to her own ongoing transformation.

Despite the male dominance of every aspect of church life, which drives many women away from working within church institutions, Riley stays, choosing instead to exert her agency in every way possible. In her book, Transforming Feminism, Riley says, “The frustration for many women within the church is great – so great that for some the only answer has been to leave the church. For Catholic feminists who choose to remain within the faith tradition, the transformation of the church beyond patriarchy is the enduring agenda.”

Riley chose to remain a sister, moving that agenda by continuing to create opportunities to promote a changed role for

68 Riley, interview, October 7, 2016.
69 Riley, Transforming Feminism, xiii
women in the Catholic Church. She produced turnkey\textsuperscript{70} feminist programs, trained women as trainers to broaden the implementation of COC feminist programs, constantly wrote articles and monographs, and presented at conferences whenever and wherever her voice could make a difference.

Maria Riley was never one to hold a narrow view, and that was especially true about feminism. As a doctor of English literature, Riley was deeply concerned with the impact of language on discrimination. In her writing and public speaking, she pushed relentlessly not only for gender-neutral language, but also for sensitivity to how society uses language to denigrate women. In a speech she gave in 1984 called, “Eve and Mary The Mother Are Our Stem,” she said, “Our language also reveals our ambiguity…We praise the nurturing mother but fear being tied to her apron strings; we admire the strong outspoken direct male and denigrate the castrating bitch; we speak of the essential role women religious have played in building the US church, but we refer to them as nunny bunnies.”\textsuperscript{71}

The 1980s proved to be a disappointing decade for people like Riley and organizations like the COC that believed that society was strengthened when everyone participated in lifting up all people, leaving no one behind. The 1980s saw a reversal in public policy from the expansive Keynesian period exemplified by the Great Society, moving national and international governmental organizations from a philosophy of coming together for the good of all, of the importance to the whole of society of eliminating poverty, including all in society’s gains, to a

\textsuperscript{70} Setting up a turnkey program requires the dissemination of user-friendly sets of information that permit local or partner organizations to easily replicate a program. Set up online or in hard copy, they can include the purpose of the program, suggested strategies and tactics, local potential partner organizations, what human and other resources are needed to carry out the program, suggested roles and responsibilities of personnel, suggested timelines for the program, and a set of sample documents that can include sample correspondence, press kits, marketing materials, and any other special documents that are needed to support the program.

\textsuperscript{71} Center of Concern Records (COC), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556, Maria Riley, CCOC 2010-276, Box: 10/02, Folder: Maria Riley, “Eve and Mary the Mother are our Stem, All our Centuries go Back to Them,” (Speech/Presentation, organization and location not specified, April 1984).
neoliberal philosophy that celebrates the market instead of the common good and disciplines individuals to be self-reliant, especially financially, and states, especially those in the global South, to cut social provision to the bone. Toward the end of this disappointing decade, Riley would try one more time to move the church hierarchy toward the empowerment of women. The vehicle was a pastoral letter, one of three with which COC was engaged with the bishops. It was also the only one that was not published.

2.5 Bishops Try Defining the Role of Women in the Church and Fail Again

And so we name ourselves church and in so doing we gather the bonds of oppression – Racism, Imperialism, Classism, Militarism, Sexism, Heterosexism, Ecclesial Patriarchy – and transform them into life giving elements.

Maria Riley
Reflection in the Program Agenda
Women Moving Church

In the mid-1980s, the COC turned its attention to working with the bishops’ conference, assisting them in creating pastoral letters on peace and economic development and women in the church and society.\(^\text{72}\) James Hug talks about how COC became involved: “They [the bishops] were going to do a [pastoral] letter on nuclear arms - Bishop [Joseph] Bernadine [leading it] – and somebody leaked a draft to the New York Times, and instead of pulling the gates and circling the wagons, they decided to use that to open up a discussion…getting input from outside. That opened it up and made it possible for everybody to get involved. This [the pastoral letters] became a discernment and the COC was a leader in that.”\(^\text{73}\) The peace and economic letters were promulgated, putting the bishops on record for peace and disarmament and for a fair world


\(^73\) Hug interview.
economic order. The role of women in the church and society – well, that was a different situation altogether.

James Hug did not join the staff of the COC until 1986. He was not at the COC for the peace pastoral letter, but came on board during the work on the economic justice letter. The letter on women was also in the drafting and feedback stage at that point. Talking directly to Riley during the interview, Hug explained, “What you folks did was read and do an analysis of the draft and put out recommendations for how it could be changed and send that out to every religious community…It would start a conversation…There was a feedback system and they [the bishops] would update the draft.”74

The bishops’ pastoral letter on women was entitled, “Partners in the Mystery of Redemption.” There was no original first draft of the pastoral letter in Riley’s files. However, there was an undated, 28-page draft document of the COC critique of that first draft. Riley led the team in creating that critique, which comments on the draft letter by section. In the six-page introduction to the comments, the COC team says, “The pastoral response opens the church in the U.S. to the profound challenge women are raising. It is the challenge to take seriously the ‘sin of sexism’ in the church and in the society. The pastoral draft calls for ‘a profound examination of conscience, a call to conversion and a call for action.’”75 The critique takes on the methodology, calling on the bishops to go beyond simply presenting raw data and to match their previous efforts at pastorals, which the critique explains included strong analysis and interpretation of that data. COC calls into question the framework of the chapters, indicating the framework was based on a male interpretation of the experiences of women, and they conclude

74 Hug, interview, October 7, 2016.
the three main issues by calling into question the pastoral’s analysis, which the COC team believed did not take into consideration the structural dimensions of sexism.

The COC team then went into their individual subject analyses, starting with the positive aspects of the letter: it began with a listening process; expressed the plurality of women’s experiences in the church; called out by name the “sin” of sexism in the church; raised controversial women’s issues within the church; provided resources for ongoing discussions of sexism; and offered recommendations to address sexism. The analysis then went into its critique. A few examples of the COC comments include:

- On the family, “the family issue is circumscribed by a predominately Caucasian ethnocentric ideal of the nuclear family,” the COC team recommended an “expanded understanding” of the family;
- On language, this issue “covers images of God, the interpretation of Scripture, the consistent noninclusive language that dominated church documents,” they recommended “the committee revise and strengthen the section on language”;
- On ordination, “the question of ordination remains the Achilles heel of this document,” they recommended “the draft deal more clearly and honestly” on ordination.76

This strong critique notwithstanding, according to Riley and Hug, the overall impression of the women religious organizations was fairly positive. They believed they would be able to work with the US bishops to come to a draft that was at least acceptable to all. Riley and Hug explained how things went wrong. “They could never come to an agreement on the women,” he said. “The Bishops first draft, we thought it wasn’t too bad.” At this point Riley comes into the

76 Ibid.
conversation. “It was Rome that kept cutting back on what the bishops here could say about women,” she recalled. “It got so bad. In the end, basically the laity just said don’t do it.” 77 A statement by the US bishops on women in the church has never been promulgated.

This disheartening experience just behind her, by the end of the 1980s, Maria Riley needed a break. She took a one-year sabbatical traveling into India and Zimbabwe, with several stops in Great Britain. Writing upon her return to some of her Adrian Dominican family, Riley talked about her wonder at what she saw and how it inspired her:

The first question people consistently ask is ‘What did you learn?’ I am usually struck dumb…because there is so much new I encountered…My stay in India was by far the most overwhelming…Your land is so large and so complex, the cultures so ancient and rich and the problems of poverty so great in the midst of wealth of natural resources…Zimbabwe was so different. There are certainly problems of poverty and unemployment, but they all seemed a bit more manageable after India. However, people’s suffering cannot be qualified and should not be compared.” 78

What she learned during that year had a strong impact on her and her continuing work when she returned to the COC and began focusing on the necessity of national and international economic and social structural change. By the beginning of the 1990s, Riley understood that women had to broaden their agenda, to go beyond gender equality, to realize that women’s issues were, in their affect, humanity’s issues. In her book, Riley asks the question, “Has the women’s movement, in concentrating its agenda primarily on the advancement of women, failed to incorporate related issues, such as for example, the wider economic issues of debt – personal, national and global – and its impact on the quality of life for all?…To answer such questions, the future agenda of the women’s movement must move beyond equality toward transformation of

77 Riley and Hug, interview, October 7, 2016. Rome refers to the Vatican. This was during the pontificate of John Paul II.
78 Center of Concern Records (COC), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556, Maria Riley, CCOC 1998-122, Maria Disc 7 (FL. Disc), Letter addressed to “Dear Sister Mary John and Sisters,” dated October 2, 1989.
our social structures.” As Riley’s ideas about societal structures evolved, she came to realize that gaining equality for women within a world economic system that was innately unfair was not going to be enough. For women’s lives to significantly improve, all of society had to become more humane. Women’s fight had to redirect from just their disadvantages in an unjust world, to reimagining and transforming a corrupt and dysfunctional world system. This would become Riley’s overarching goal in the 1990s.

2.6 Riley Takes on Poverty in the Global South and the US

The idea that robust economic growth will automatically lead to a better life for everybody is comforting. Unfortunately, it is also wrong. The concrete effects of decades of political and economic policies designed to promote and sustain growth contradict the hypothesis that corporate-led economic growth is the only path to reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for all people…the quest for growth in GDP and corporate profits has in fact worsened the lives of millions of women and men.

Joyce V. Millen, Alec Irwin, and Jim Yong Kim

*Dying for Growth*

In 1955, twenty-nine independent African and Asian nations met to discuss common concerns in Bandung, Indonesia. This meeting gave concrete meaning to the notion of a “Third World” and led a few years later to the establishment of the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) of nations determined to avoid the vortex of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. These nations were attempting to walk an independent path, not lining up with either the free market capitalism of the US-led First World or the bureaucratized socialism of the Soviet-led Second World. At its height, NAM could count over sixty nations in its alliance. However, given the military and economic power of the two Cold War superpowers and the devastating impact of neocolonialism, multinational corporations, and later structural adjustment programs

---

79 Riley, *Transforming Feminism*, 40.
imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on these increasingly indebted countries, it is not surprising that many of the governments of the original leaders were overthrown, or their countries became failed states. What these countries did accomplish was to form a bloc of votes within the UN that forced that organization to turn its attention to the challenges faced by their people, especially their women. Specifically addressing the impact of debt and the policies of the World Bank, historian Vijay Prashad provides the numbers:

In 1970, when the Third World project was intact, the sixty states classified as “low-income” by the World Bank owed commercial lenders and international agencies $25 billion. Three decades later, the debt of these states ballooned to $523 billion. An impoverished conversation on debt yields no agenda to combat this fundamental ailment for the former “Third World.” These are not ‘poor’ countries. Over the course of these three decades, the sixty states paid $550 billion in principle and interest on loans worth $540 billion. Yet they still owe $523 billion. The alchemy of international usury binds the darker nations.  

This crushing debt has caused political disruption and personal misery for over fifty years. While the wealthy nations seem intractable on this issue, it remains very much on the advocacy agenda of global South countries and their activist supporters.

In 1989, upon the retirement of Peter Henriot, James Hug was promoted to executive director of the Center of Concern, a position he would hold until his retirement in 2012. Reflecting on the role of the COC in United Nations activities during his tenure, Hug contrasted the ‘90’s COC work with their first UN activities during the United Nations Decade for Women, He explains the contrast, saying the COC “was founded to…educate the US church about international issues…looking at UN conferences. Through the ‘70s, the Center’s strategy was to work with academics and intellectual elites and to do high level papers to try to influence the outcomes of the conferences.” Moving onto the 1990s, Hug continues, “There were starting to

---

be people coming in from NGOs [Nongovernmental Organizations] and running parallel conferences and trying to lobby and that’s where we got back into the UN world.”

With the success of the UN Decade of Women (1975-1985) conferences, which produced increasingly impactful reports and recommendations that were taken seriously by international women’s organizations, and increasingly by UN member governments, the UN continued engaging in these large international conferences through the following decade, focusing them on broader economic development and social justice issues. NGOs realized these conferences provided them an opportunity to have an impact on economic and social policy in multiple countries at once. However, conference participants were representatives of their countries. To gain influence, the NGOs worked with the UN and with each other, creating parallel forums of their members. Working in tandem with the UN, they would receive draft language that was being developed for discussion and action by the UN member state representatives to consider at the conference. The NGOs then met, discussed, worked out compromises among themselves, and provided requests for changes on that original UN language. They were lobbying the UN bureaucracy and the country representatives to change original draft language to be more aligned with the policy prescriptions of the NGOs. These pre-meetings would begin a year before the actual conference date.

The COC was founded in the 1970s specifically to have an impact on the earlier conferences. Through studying and providing information about UN conferences, the COC established relationships in the 1980s with some international Catholic development agencies who had benefited by COC’s work. In the 1990s, those groups came together to develop an umbrella organization for their agencies called CIDSE, which is still operational. It includes 16

---

81 Hug, interview, October 7, 2016.
organizations such as the US Catholic Relief Services, Development and Peace of Caritas Canada, The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, and Trócaire in Ireland.82

Recognizing Riley’s lobbying experience and abilities honed at previous UN conferences, CIDSE contracted with the COC to teach their members how to lobby their interests with the 1990s UN conference participants. In keeping with their contract, the COC would coordinate their lobbying work. That meant working with the various organizations to identify any issues each might have with the language that had been forwarded by the UN and then try to work out language that would be acceptable to all sides having an interest.83

Fresh from her sabbatical in India and Zimbabwe, Riley was ready to take on this new challenge. As CIDSE recognized, Riley was not new to UN conferences or to this process. She had been to all but the Mexico conference on women during the 1975-1985 UN Decade for Women. However, this was going to be a more direct, more intense effort for her and the COC – a coordinating role in the lobbying effort, mainly through a woman’s caucus, which proved to be the strongest caucus working these conferences.

As the conference lobbying work moved forward, this formidable women’s caucus continued to grow in influence, as did Riley and Hug. The caucus was formed and headed by former Congresswoman Bella Abzug, at this point operating from her position as co-founder of the Women’s Environment and Development Organization. She had been a politically sophisticated, determined voice for women’s interests in the US Congress. She brought her seasoned, sharp political instincts to this new task for the NGO’s women’s caucus. Riley remembers her with great fondness:

---

82 CIDSE stands for “Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité.” Additional information is available on their website: http://www.cidse.org/ (accessed June 1, 2017).
83 Hug interview.
Oh Bella. She organized the women’s caucus for these conferences, so if you weren’t a part of the big NGO meeting, you had a base to work from. So, I got very involved with the women’s caucus in terms of trying to influence what the UN conference was doing. Of course, I was somewhat unique…as the only nun there, and Bella just loved me because I didn’t fall into any of her categories of what a nun should be, should say or should do, especially on women’s issues—population and women’s rights. Bella just loved the fact she had a nun, and when the Vatican representative would be waxing eloquent, she’d always bring me in. That was the ‘94/’95 period.\(^{84}\)

Out of the habit for decades, Riley is very clear that she did not “lead” with being a sister. It is not that she hid her woman religious identity. She just did not start relationships with it. If people found out, that was fine. If they did not, that was also fine. However, she did make a point of saying the Vatican representatives seemed to keep an eye on her and James Hug, who was working these conferences in tandem with Riley. She remembers clearly at least one time when a Vatican representative she did not know made a point to say “hello, sister,” his eyes following her as she found a seat in one of the rooms off the main conference area during the preparatory meetings before the Beijing conference.\(^{85}\)

Riley and Hug remembered one particular situation that typified the kind of work they were doing at the pre-conference meetings. Their NGO colleagues were expressing distress to them over the US position on human rights coming out of the Clinton Administration. Characterizing it as much more conservative than those that had been put forward during the first Bush Administration, they asked Hug and Riley to intercede.

Hug started the story from there: “I knew a woman from my time working at the Woodstock Theological Center named Melanne Verveer,\(^{86}\) who was working for Hillary Clinton. I sent an email off to Melanne, saying send help, they are saying your position is way too

\(^{84}\) Riley, interview, October 7, 2016.
\(^{85}\) Ibid.
\(^{86}\) Verveer went on to Ambassador for Global Women’s Issues in the Obama Administration and is now a professor of international relations at Georgetown University.
conservative.” Hug continues, “I came back that night and there were pink slips all over the
place telling me the White House had called. In the meantime, Maria had just met up at the hotel
with a woman from Chile whose husband’s name was Juan Somavia. She told Maria she knew
her secret – that she was a nun.” Riley picks it up: “I said that’s no secret. Turned out her secret
was she was married to head of the whole conference and they were Catholic.” Summing up,
Riley says, “So, we became friends, which helped through the years…and then this delegation
came up from the State Department and those two people followed us around for the rest of the
meeting making sure we were happy with their position.”

After Beijing, the UN conferences slowed down, but the severe poverty and inequality
did not go away. Of the present situation of the global South, Prashad argues, “The limitations
of IMF-driven globalization and revanchist traditionalism provoke mass movements across the
planet. The battles for land rights and water rights, for cultural dignity and economic parity for
women’s rights and indigenous rights, for the construction of democratic institutions and
responsive states – these are legion in every country, on every continent.”

The United States was not and is not exempt. President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s Great
Society programs aimed at ending poverty, hunger, substandard housing, and poor schools in
America. Medicare and Medicaid, the federally funded healthcare programs that one in five
Americans now rely on for their healthcare, were created during his Administration. When he
assumed the presidency, Ronald Reagan sought to limit dependence on federal money. His
philosophy of limited government would continue, with a little more or a little less intensity,

---

87 Somavia held several positions at the UN, including: Chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit
for Social Development, which is probably the title he held at the time Riley is referencing. He went on to be President of the
UN Economic and Social Council twice, Representative of Chile on the UN Security Council, and by 1999 was the Secretary
General of the International Labour Organization.

88 Riley and Hug, interview, October 7, 2016.

89 Prashad, The Darker Nations, 281.
through both Bush administrations as well as the Clinton administration. As she observed the impact of these post-Reagan policies, it became clear to Riley that the devastation of poverty and discrimination she had been addressing in the global South was just as true in her own country, and just as structural. In the last year of the presidency of George H.W. Bush, Riley produced a case study on the increasing internal, economic inequality caused by the policies enacted by the Reagan administration that were continuing under President Bush, and were having a disproportionate negative impact on American women. Called “Structural Adjustment: U.S. Style,” her article summarizing the study appeared in *Center Focus*, the COC newsletter. In it Riley writes:

> The policies of the 1980s have exacerbated the historical inequalities that exist in the U.S…In every arena, the ‘trickle down’ theory of structural adjustment has diminished women’s opportunity for economic, social and political gain. Economic restricting, by drastically cutting health, childcare, education and training, food and housing support, makes it virtually impossible for low income women to function.⁹⁰

This monograph played an important role in the ongoing work of the COC with global South countries. It showed that neoliberal economic ideas were painful no matter the place or its base economic status. Riley and the COC stressed that the US, and certainly the COC, was not at these NGO meetings to show the way. They were there to learn with their colleagues how together they could change the institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, that were run in the interest of multinational corporations and banks and according to the increasingly influential principles of neoliberal economics. This is an example of the influence of Riley’s faith on her work. Fundamental to the Catholic idea of ministry, especially those who follow the ideals of Liberation Theology, is the concept of “walking with,” not being

---

an all-knowing, bountiful, paternalistic giver of charity, but rather someone who has come into
community, is listening and learning, and is walking with the people one is there to serve,
experiencing their life by living it with them.

Riley’s next project would directly take on the international infrastructure that created the
rules for global trade. In the process, she would create a new international network for and by
women, for whom international trade policy was, and is, a major impediment to financial
stability for millions of small farmers and microbusinesses around the world.91

2.7 Riley Creates the International Gender and Trade Network

The gender-differentiated effects of trade liberalization are felt at the macro level,
meso and micro levels, and are the result of differences between women and men
in their access to assets, human capital, labour markets and labour earnings.

Kate Higgins
The North-South Institute
Gender and Free Trade Agreements
Best Practices Policy Guidance
International Gender and Trade Network

As Riley remembers it, the idea to try to pull together an international network of women
to work in coalition on international trade issues got started in 1995, on the plane ride coming
back from the Beijing conference. As the idea solidified, Riley wrote a proposal that she sent off
to the Ford Foundation. “I walked into the room and presented my proposal,” Riley
remembered, “and she [the grant officer] said, I have been waiting for someone like you to walk
into this office for two years.” The complimentary words were followed by a $200,000 grant to
plan and implement the project on gender and trade and to create a network. Riley started this
work in 1998. By 1999 they were far enough along in their implementation to send

---
91 Riley and Hug interview, October 7, 2016.
representatives to the World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle. Riley missed that very contentious meeting in Seattle, the first of the WTO meetings that would engender major protest demonstrations against global trade policy.\footnote{Sam Howe Verhovek, “Seattle Will Drop Most of Trade Protest Cases,” \textit{New York Times} (Jan 5, 2000), http://www.nytimes.com/2000/01/05/us/seattle-will-drop-most-of-trade-protest-cases.html (accessed June 8, 2017).} She intended to go to Seattle, but tripped while boarding the plane, injured herself, and had to go to a hospital instead.

Riley was not new to trade policy work in 1998. She had been running an online trade seminar for women for years. The goal of her trade seminars was to identify key trade issues, the role played by women in policy deliberations, if any, and the impact of these policy formulations on women. Riley would attempt to bring in 45 to 50 women from a mix of countries and continents, and of backgrounds and professional expertise. She called on these women when she was pulling together the network. Using the Ford Foundation funds, Riley set up a week-long strategic planning meeting in Grenada that laid out the structure and the implementation plan for the network.\footnote{Riley and Hug interview, October 7, 2017.}

Riley ran the network from the COC for a number of years with only the able assistance of Alexandra Speildach, whose dedication to this project was typical of the women who were involved in the Network’s creation. Totally committed to the mission of the Network, Speildach worked as an unpaid volunteer for several months until the Ford grant came through. Eventually, the WTO was interested in having an annual seminar run by the network and it made sense for the network secretariat to move to Geneva to be close to WTO headquarters. Since Riley was not an economist and did not have an interest in moving to Geneva, they looked for another person to take over the daily running of the network. Given that she had to turn it over to someone else, Riley speaks of the network somewhat wistfully. However, Hug is markedly
proud of Riley’s role in that work and its importance: “That was probably the most significant structural change we accomplished, to get the WTO to actually set up an annual seminar on gender and trade.”

2.8  **Half a Century Given in the Service of Social Justice**

By the laboring wings we have come thus far to this place in the wind where we see trouble and beauty we see trouble, we see beauty and that far wandering star still calls us on

Carolyn McDade

“Trouble and Beauty”

Riley selected this poem by one of her favorite poets, Carolyn McDade, for the cover of a turnkey program for one of her COC initiatives and gave the document its name – “Trouble and Beauty.” It describes her life travels well. Through her life, Riley heard a call to justice, ready to deal with the trouble it caused her along the way, while reveling in the potential beauty it could bring to society. “It was such fun,” she says of her work.

Sr. Marilin Llanes went to work for the Center of Concern in the early 1990s. It was her first job as a newly professed sister. Llanes is one of the new generation of sisters in whom the older sisters place their hopes for a continuing, but new kind of religious life. Llanes remembers a much more complex Maria Riley than just a one-dimensional strong, determined fighter. Reflecting on her own distress at the highly transactional nature of even work for good in Washington, DC, Llanes said Riley understood she was struggling with that dichotomy. “Maria lived her feminism,” Llanes said. “She was always so kind to me and so generous with her time. She was always traveling all over the world at that time. She would bring me back something

---

94 Riley and Hug, interview, October 7, 2016.
from every trip she took.” Llanes starts to describe a small painting of a woman on batik Riley brought her after a trip to Africa. The batik is hanging in her office. As she describes it, you can see in her smile how important Riley’s caring presence was to her at a difficult time – Riley living her sisterhood.95

From her earliest years, Maria Riley knew she wanted to do something significant with her life. Through fifty years of dedication to the struggle for social justice for women, for the poor, for the marginalized everywhere in the world, she succeeded. Maria Riley engaged, using the full strength of her formidable intellect, her unflinching determination and her remarkable ability to make change work for her cause. She would push for change where it was needed and mold changing institutions whenever possible, always trying to meet the needs of those left behind by a global social and economic system that was, and is, unimaginably beneficial to the lucky few and merciless to the many not born to that small club.

Maria Riley may not always have won. However, she always gave each cause everything she had to give. She is always secure in who she is, sometimes presenting a daunting figure even to those on her side, and always to those in opposition to her initiatives. While open to new information and ready to act on new realities, Riley’s values were and are steady, built on a foundation of her faith, her love of humankind and the support of her family of sisters, who are there, ready to make sure she can be secure for the rest of her life.

Now, Riley is watching another generation, Llanes’s generation, stand on the foundation she created of a fairer, more equal role for women in the Catholic Church and world society. She sits in mission groups with some of them, recognizing the promise in this new generation of sisters entering the congregation, a much smaller generation of sisters to be sure, largely born in

95 Marilin Llanes, O.P., M.S. interview by author, Chicago, IL, June 26, 2017.
the countries of the global South, in and for which so much of Riley’s work was centered. She would be the first to say she and her generation have left them much still to do, but there is also reason to believe this generation of women is starting from a better place thanks to Riley and her generation of sisters. Like Riley, these entering sisters will be creating new ideas of religious life together, in and through a society of sisters living the shared common good.

No one could be better at summing up what has motivated and guided Riley through her eight decades of life than herself:

For me, fidelity is the arduous task of careful listening, full of care, for the Word of God as it is spoken in our world today. I hear it in the voices of the poor, the refugee, the homeless, the unemployed, among women, racial and ethnic minorities, third world peoples, in my own heart, my family, my community. These voices call me to respond, to discover ways to alleviate their suffering and alienation, to work with others to create a church and a world more responsive to the needs of all people, more reflective of God’s reign of justice and peace.

3 PETER ANTHONY SCHULTE, O.P., M.ED.

Living a Vocation in Catholic Education Through Determination and Innovation

Peter was absolutely determined to figure out what would work for each child. She would be up until 1:30 in the morning trying to find different ways to reach a child having trouble, creating materials, cutting out images, anything she thought would help. If that didn’t work, the next day she would stay up until 2:30, trying again.

Mary Newbauer
Schulte’s teacher partner at St. Vincent’s School

Although Peter Anthony Schulte momentarily forgot her childhood dream of being a teacher as she was entering the Adrian Dominican Congregation, asking to be a nurse like her sister, she was born to be a teacher. In the early 1970s, given the opportunity to leave teaching,
which so many of the sisters around the United States did, Schulte stayed for another 40 years. Tall and solidly built, with a wide smile and hardy laugh, Schulte is a performer with presence. Affable, and with the ability to find humor in almost everything, it is easy to imagine her in front of a classroom, cajoling, acting out stories, pushing when needed; making reading fun while being absolutely determined to help each child find the wonders open to readers. It is also easy to feel the steely determination Schulte exposes when she talks about times when her values were being tested.

Schulte was a teacher for 52 years. She started teaching at 20 and retired when she was 72. In the 1960s and 1970s, she was a proactive participant in schools that instituted then state-of-the-art teaching methods, including modular scheduling and Individually Guided Education (IGE). So strong was her interest in student-centered education that instilled analytic skills in students, she decided to obtain her masters of education degree in personalized learning.96

Peter Anthony Schulte entered the congregation in 1959, the year Pope John XXIII announced he was calling a Second Vatican Council. While she was not an elected delegate to the decision making meetings of the Adrian Dominican Chapter of Renewal in 1968, she was deeply affected by the pronouncements of Vatican II and by the decisions made by the congregation, which had a direct impact on her life, how her experience as a Catholic in her church changed, how her sisters’ congregation and her group of teachers would be governed on a day-to-day basis, what she would wear, and where she would work. However, when Schulte was a postulant and a novice, before all those changes occurred, she was learning the history of her teaching congregation, and the history of Catholic education in the United States with which it was aligned – vital tools for navigating the complex milieu of Catholic schools.97

96 Schulte interview, and Mary Newbauer, interview by author, Ft. Wayne, IN, June 27, 2017.
97 Schulte, interview.
3.1 An Education System Emerges from Religious Disputes in Public Schools

The American Bishops gathered at the First Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1852. They issued a directive: “Encourage the establishment and support of Catholic schools; make every sacrifice which may be necessary for this object.”

Patricia A. Bauch, O.P., ed.
*Catholic Schools in the Public Interest*

University of Alabama Education Leadership and Policy Professor Emerita Sr. Patricia Bauch points to this directive as a direct result of religious intolerance toward Catholics that was emerging in the mid-nineteenth century. The Know-Nothing Party singled out the first large wave of Irish and German Catholic immigration as a threat to its idea of US culture and values. As tensions increased, violence broke out and threatened to spread as Catholics moved to protect their families, their homes, and their churches. “After two churches were burned in Philadelphia in 1844, in New York, Bishop John Hughes prepared a plan of defense for every Catholic church in the city,” Bauch writes. “In the event of trouble, a force of 1,000 Catholic men, prepared to fight to the death, would surround the churches.”

Us Catholics clearly signaled their intention to forcefully face down discrimination, especially against their children, a stance that led to the creation of a major education system, the US Catholic schools.

During the nineteenth century, one of the goals of public education was to foster Protestant values in future US citizens, whatever their religion might be. Protestant values, as defined by the Protestant majority’s elites, were considered to be American values. To encourage the inculcation of such values, the King James Bible was distributed to each child as if it were a text book, and reading scripture during class from that bible was part of every class day.

In *The Contemporary Catholic School*, University of Cambridge education philosopher Terence

---

McLaughlin describes the bible controversy in US schools in the nineteenth century: “The Protestantism of the common schools was often explicit, especially regarding the Scriptures…[However] the Catholic laity rarely read the Scriptures and when they did, they used the Douay-Rheims edition, a significantly different version than the King James edition used by the Protestants. In Philadelphia, Bishop James Kenrick was denied his request that the Douay version be given to Catholic children in the public schools.” Most Catholic clergy and Catholic parents saw the demand that their Catholic children read and recite from the King James Bible as demanding their children commit heresy. Many passed that feeling along to their children, who then felt they were being forced to commit sinful acts every day.  

As the number of Catholics coming to America increased rapidly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Catholic hierarchy’s desire to steep their children in Catholic teaching intensified as well. The US Catholic population increased from 500,000 in 1829 to 8,000,000 by 1884.  

A turning point in the development of Catholic education came in the latter. With Catholic immigration showing no signs of subsiding, the bishops took forward-looking steps to meet the needs of Catholic education for the next generation. According to Bauch, the directive of the bishops that was promulgated after their deliberations during their next national meeting “decreed that every parish had two years to build a school and every family was bound to send its children to Catholic schools under pain of sin.” 

Probably not by coincidence, 1884 was also the year the Adrian Dominican Sisters founded two schools in Michigan, along with their first hospital. The Adrian Dominican Sisters

---

100 Ibid., 7.
101 Bauch, *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest*, 46.
Congregation, its sisters by this time having had thirty years of teaching experience in New York and Traverse City, began work as a teaching and nursing congregation in its new home in Adrian. Over the next one hundred years, Adrian Dominican sisters would become the backbone of the education programs in many of the parishes of the Midwest from Illinois to Indiana to Michigan and beyond, and would become an important partner of the Catholic Healthcare Association through their sponsorship of hospitals.102

With the sisters and some brothers and priests providing faculty at very low or no cost, US Catholic schools thrived from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Schulte remembers she was paid $1,700 a year in the 1970s, half of which she returned to the motherhouse. Catholic school depended on these low staffing costs, and when there was a mass departure of teaching sisters and brothers from the Catholic school system in the second half of the twentieth century, the fortunes of the US Catholic schools began a steep downward slide that continues today. “In 1962, Catholic schools enrolled about 47% of a Catholic school-age population of 11.4 million; in 1979, 33%, by 1991 this had plummeted to 18% of 11.8 million Catholic school-age children…” Bauch writes. “Then, suddenly and apparently unanticipated, the bottom fell out, 5.5 million students in 1965 declined…to fewer than 1.5 million in 2010.” Bauch then discusses the impact of the loss of women and men religious: “By 1975, sisters had declined by 25% and brothers by 30% - both catastrophic in terms of the impact on school staffing since these groups received subsistence wages.”103

By the late twentieth century, many Catholic schools were turning their bricks and mortar over to charter schools and entertaining the idea of religious charter schools as a possible way of

---

102 Ryan, *Amid the Alien Corn*, 63-64.
103 Bauch, *Catholic Schools in the Public Interest*, 274 and 281.
saving Catholic education. The Chicago St. Denis Parish School is an example of these changes and also an important part of the history of the Adrian Dominican sisters. It is the school where many of the sisters who later became leaders of the congregation started their teaching careers and one of the schools where the Chicago diocese experimented with Individually Guided Education. The sisters lived in the St. Denis Convent, across the street from the school and church. Five Adrian sisters still live in that convent, but not for long. Three are retired teachers. The other two are the future of the congregation, a sister born in Cuba who is the only bilingual psychologist working with public school children in Joliet and a sister from the Dominican Republic who is a chaplain working at Loyola University Hospital and who will be making final profession this year. Before Fall 2017, they will be leaving the old convent for more modern quarters in a Chicago suburb, ending a significant era in the history of that parish and of the Adrian Dominican Congregation, an era that really ended with the closing of the school several decades ago.

3.2 To Her Surprise, Schulte Becomes a Teacher and a Baker

Actually, I thought I was going to be a nurse like my sister and save the world. I entered on a Saturday. Sunday, we signed up for classes and Monday we started classes. So, on Sunday I said to the registrar, Sister Bertha, ‘What classes do I need to take to go into nurses training.’ She just looked at me and patted me on the head and said, ‘Honey, you’re going to make a fine teacher.’

Peter Anthony Schulte

By the time she entered, Schulte may have become a teacher unintentionally, but there is no doubt she found her vocation. Born in 1940 and reared in Detroit, where she was baptized Rita, Schulte started telling her parents she was going to be a nun when she was in second grade.

---

She claims her mother would respond by saying, “You just don’t want to pay taxes,” and laugh. Schulte had no idea where that notion came from or what it meant, but she would laugh along with her mother. Having worked in Catholic schools throughout her career, she actually did not pay taxes. Just two weeks after her high school graduation, in 1959 at the age of 18, she entered the Adrian Dominican Congregation and two days later she was a postulant and a student at Siena Heights University, taking classes to learn theology and scripture, to understand her vows and to learn how to be a teacher. Six months later, when she became a novice, she was also learning how to bake bread.106

When they were not in classes, postulants and novices performed housekeeping duties around the Adrian campus. Schulte and one other novice were assigned to the in-house bakery, which the congregation has since closed. Every morning, the two young women would bake 90 loaves of bread and whatever special bakery needs were required each day for events at the motherhouse, St. Joseph Academy and the Infirmary. Mary Ann Ennis, not assigned to the bakery, remembered the wonderful smell of the baking bread. Schulte remembered the strong smell of yeast mixed with warm water and sugar that was waiting for her first thing every morning. Speaking about that smell, Schulte said, “When we were at a point where we could leave the bread and go up to mass, Oh, I was so glad that I was out of there.” When asked if she still bakes bread, Schulte let out a long, heartfelt “no,” and then said, “That was the last thing I wanted to do, to bake bread.” She also makes it a point to say that she does not know how to mix dough for less than 17 loaves, way too many for a friend’s dinner party.107

By the late 1950s, sisters like Schulte benefitted not only from the Sister Formation Conference advances in sister-teacher education, but also because the states were then requiring

106 Schulte interviews, April 28 and June 1, 2017
107 Schulte and Ennis interview, June 1, 2017.
certification of all teachers. In Michigan, teachers had to have at least two years of college and had to still be in school, working to finish their bachelor’s degree. Schulte finished the required credits for certification in a year and half. She was in the classroom, beginning her half-century teaching career, by 1962. Like all teaching Adrian sisters, Schulte’s full-time education in the university was over. The sisters would teach during the school year and take intensive courses offered at Siena Heights University during the summer. There were also qualified university professors at most of the convents who could provide courses during the school year. It took four more years for Schulte to complete her bachelor’s degree. She graduated in 1965 and would wait a decade between obtaining her undergraduate degree and going to Concordia University in Illinois to obtain her masters of education degree.¹⁰⁸

Because Schulte entered before Vatican II and her experiences during that time of transition were very intense, but not atypical, Schulte’s memories of those times are illuminating. Before Vatican II, sisters were given new names when they were received into a congregation. The Adrian Dominicans were no exception. When given the opportunity after Vatican II changes, most changed back to their baptismal names. Schulte did not.

She became Peter Anthony when Mother Gerald was still the prioress. Mother Gerald gave each woman a deadline by which she had an opportunity to submit to Mother Gerald three names the woman wanted to take when she was received into the congregation. Mother Gerald would pick the one she thought best. Schulte says she tried multiple combinations of her parents’ names, Marian and Joseph. Those were all taken by other sisters, so she tried combinations with Josephina. Those too were taken. By this time, the deadline was upon her. According to Schulte, at around midnight on the last night before her deadline, she still had not

---

¹⁰⁸ Schulte interview, June 1, 2017.
identified her three possible names. Sr. Margaret Philip was helping her. They were in the refectory trying to come up with something when Sr. Margaret Philip suggested Schulte just give up and let Mother Gerald pick something. Knowing some of the names Mother Gerald had selected, Schulte said she had no intention of taking that option. At this point, she had one part of the name selected – her father’s middle name – Anthony. She was trying to come up with a name that would work with Anthony. She explains how she found Peter:

We were looking through the book [Office book] and I came across June 29th and I see Peter. Hey, I really like that name, so I become Peter. Well, its Advent, so I can’t write my parents to tell them my new name. You couldn’t write during Advent. So, now its reception day and I haven’t had a chance to talk to my parents and we’re all in church and the bishop is giving out the names. Everyone is very quiet because they want to hear the names and he calls out Rita Schulte who will now be Sr. Peter Anthony. My dad pokes my mom and says for the whole chapel to hear, “what the hell are they calling her?”

When asked why she did not return to her baptized name after Vatican II changes, Schulte says, “I never liked Rita, and we could clear out a dressing room when Ellen and I would go shopping and she’d be trying something on and she’d shout out, ‘Peter come here and look at this.’” Schulte makes the sound of doors slamming.¹⁰⁹

3.3 An Innovative Education Program is Scuttled by an Inflexible Clergy

We have something no other Catholic school has – Noise! And we love it.

John Newbauer, school counselor, St. Vincent de Paul
Quoted in the Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette, October 15, 1970

Newbauer was referring to the happy noise the students made when they changed classes throughout the day, as they moved from one subject to the next, even if they were in first grade. For Schulte’s first three years at St. Vincent de Paul, a first through eighth grade parish school in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, it ran like any other Catholic grade school. Students sat in their room all

¹⁰⁹ Schulte, interview, April 28, 2017.
day, maybe going to a special room for music or art. They worked from a curriculum that allotted 40 minutes per subject through the day, in the same order every day. However, with the encouragement of guidance counselor John Newbauer, Principal Ellen Murphy, also an Adrian Dominican, was about to shake things up and Schulte loved it.\footnote{Schulte, interview. June 1, 2017.}

Newbauer was a determined innovator who believed there had to be a better way to educate children, one that would engage the students in their education. He found a like-minded partner in Murphy. Murphy and Newbauer began an odyssey around the Midwest, starting with visits to the Chicago diocese that was experimenting with Individually Guided Education (IGE). From there they sought out, and learned from, innovative programs in Catholic and public schools in Detroit, Lansing, Cincinnati, and Dayton, at one point going all the way to Florida. When they came back to Ft. Wayne, they instituted Flexible Modular Scheduling and a form of IGE similar to that in Chicago.

Individually Guided Education is described by Pyeong-gook Kim in his presentation, “The Rise and Fall of Individually Guided Education,” as “an alternative to the traditional age-graded form of elementary schooling.” Kim explains that IGE schools are marked by shared decision making at all levels and involves the students in the planning and implementation of their education. According to Kim, the main issues that arose with the program revolved around incomplete implementation.\footnote{Pyeong-gook Kim, “The Rise and Fall of Individually Guided Education,” 1969-1979,” Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, (New Orleans, LA, April 1-5, 2002).}

That was not the problem at St. Vincent de Paul. Schulte was thrilled to be implementing this kind of program – as was her teacher-partner who later married John Newbauer. The school was such a defining experience for the staff that 40 years later, three couples who met and
married while working at the school, including John and Mary Newbauer, are all still friends. Along with Schulte and Murphy, they have taken vacations together through the years and still see each other regularly. John and Mary Newbauer visit Murphy at the nursing home on the Adrian campus, and now that Schulte has retired to the motherhouse as well, she spends time with Murphy every day. Schulte says that Murphy is still visited by parents of the children they taught in Ft. Wayne 45 years ago.¹¹²

As Schulte describes it, the scheduling was challenging. Set up every quarter, each day was divided into 20-minute modules. They could be put together as 20, 40, or 60-minute time blocks for each subject, and each day the time allotted to each subject for each child could be different, depending upon the needs of the child and the student’s progress in any subject. Schulte says it was a wonderful way to work creative methods into a reading class to engage students. Newbauer remembered Schulte having the students act out stories, put on plays, and bring in artifacts that illustrated something the students were reading. Schulte liked the freedom she and the students had so she could teach each student in the way that was best for them while still asking the students to take some responsibility for their learning along with the teacher.¹¹³

The Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) education school was deeply involved in supporting and studying the program at St. Vincent de Paul. Graduate students from their education program were invaluable partners to the teachers at the school. “With 45 to 55 students to a class, I couldn’t do everything the program required by myself,” Schulte explains. “At the end of each reading assignment, the students were interviewed, asked questions about what they read to test their understanding of the material and what they learned.” She continues, “At any time, I had three or four grad students from IPFW to help with the

¹¹² Newbauer interview; Schulte interview, June 1, 2017.
¹¹³ Schulte interview, June 1, 2017.
interviews, sent by their professors because the universities wanted them to learn how to do this and bring it back to their classes.” Newbauer points out that under this program, some students who were having problems with reading progressed two to three grade levels in one year. He credits Schulte’s teaching with no small contribution to that success.

For reasons that had nothing to do with its efficacy, the program came to an end in 1972. In fact, the Catholic school superintendent, the board of St. Vincent de Paul, and the parents, had approved the program and everyone appeared very happy with the results. The program was collateral damage of the distress caused to many, including the clergy, by the outcomes of Vatican II. During this time, 22 sisters from various congregations left the diocese, including all the Adrians from St. Vincent de Paul. All the congregations were holding Chapters of Renewal, during which they made decisions about all aspects of their lives, including whether to continue wearing the habit. Most congregations that decided to wear secular clothes set up a time period of a year or so to give themselves and the laity and clergy with whom they worked time to become accustomed to the change. This was a far more disturbing change than those not in religious life might assume. In rapid succession, Catholics were experiencing mass differently, taking the Eucharist differently, and relating to men and women religious differently. Theirs was becoming a church that some did not recognize and many found deeply upsetting.\(^\text{115}\)

St Vincent de Paul was a large parish with an equally large parish school. The school had 1,000 students. They came from all economic backgrounds, from poor farm families to well-to-do professional and business families. The parish covered 100 miles of territory, with parishioners who were on a continuum from conservative Catholics stunned by the changes of Vatican II, to those who were thrilled with their new sense of inclusion in their church. To ease

\(^{114}\) Schulte, interview, April 28, 2017.  
\(^{115}\) Mary Newbauer, interview.
the transition, to build bridges as Schulte said, the parish clergy, along with the sisters, were holding masses in the homes of the parishioners, asking the hosts to invite friends and family. Through this process, the sisters were becoming confident that the parishioners were getting to know them as individuals and to feel comfortable with them. As Schulte put it, “They were saying, oh, so you’re not some big radical. You still believe in the Pope.”

However, some rocky times lay ahead. By way of example, Schulte tells the story of being reported to the parish council by one of the parents for “frequenting the laundromat” on Saturdays. Murphy had to explain to the council that Schulte was at the laundromat because the convent had well water with rust in it and it would stain their white habits. So, every Saturday, Schulte went to the laundromat in town to wash their habits in city water. Laughing, Schulte says, “What did she think I was doing?” This incident was just one of many that led the 10 sisters from Adrian to decide they would stop wearing the habit in two groups. Five would do it immediately and five would wait a year.

Their first clue that even this idea would not be sufficient to quell the distress of those disturbed by these changes became clear when Murphy called a “state of the union” meeting for the parents and opened it up for questions. Schulte describes this idea as, “Oh, a big problem,” She explains. “Ellen opened it up to questions, and from the back someone said, ‘well, you know if you just wear your habits we’d know who you are.’” Schulte describes what happened next, “Dead silence and then a few started clapping and it grew. I never felt like anyone stabbed me before…It was like a knife cutting through you. It said, we trusted you one day, and now because you changed your clothes, we don’t trust you anymore.” She continues, “The pastor and the superintendent said we had to continue to wear the habit ‘because the children don’t know who you are unless you have that habit on.’” “No,” Schulte told him, “They know who we are.
You don’t know who we are.” Schulte continues, “We said if it means that much to you, we will wear our habit during school hours. We believed in that school. They said no. All 22 sisters walked out at one time.” ¹¹⁶

Never one to lose her sense of humor, Schulte goes on to tell a happier story about the change from the habit. The ten Adrian sisters were given tickets for a performance of *Man of La Mancha* that same night, which was before they had the opportunity to buy clothes. This was a special treat, an important evening, and she felt she could not wear her habit to the theater since she now did not have to wear it. Schulte found some material and started making a dress for that evening. She did not know how to make button-holes and did not have a zipper. She sewed herself into the dress and had to have one of the sisters cut her out of it when she got home. ¹¹⁷

From Ft. Wayne, Schulte and Murphy went together to the Chicago IGE schools, where Schulte worked for another satisfying seven years. She speculates that when the Chicago Diocese did not have the money to pay their superintendent, the IGE initiative slowly died from neglect. She continued to teach in various schools in the Midwest, from Chicago to South Bend, Indiana and Wilmette, Illinois. Eventually, she became an expert in setting up student councils, work John Newbauer says she started at St. Vincent de Paul in Ft. Wayne. She would guide the students through the process of determining how they would govern themselves, what role they wanted to play in school governance and operations, and how they wanted to run elections for their replacements, a practicum in civics that probably turned out a number of active citizens. It is work that Schulte remembers with pleasure. During her last fourteen years of teaching, after many decades of working with seventh and eighth graders, Schulte worked with the youngest

¹¹⁶ Schulte interview, April 28, 2017.
¹¹⁷ Schulte interview, June 1, 2017.
children, once again a reading resource teacher. Loving teaching, she did not retire until the age of 72 in 2013.118

3.4 Learning Through Experience – Teaching with Understanding

I didn’t learn to read until I was in fifth grade. How could I get to fifth grade and no one figured out I couldn’t read?

Peter Anthony Schulte

Sr. Mary Ann Ennis and I were together with Schulte when she told us the story of her difficulties in learning to read and the remarkable teacher who discovered her childhood secret and changed her life. Schulte had used her extraordinary memory and listening ability to memorize the stories in her first through third grade readers. As each student would read the portion of the reader for the day, Schulte would listen carefully, memorize it, and then repeat it when it was her turn. Her problem was not that she could not see or understand the letters. She had trouble coordinating the letters with their sounds. As she recalled, “Hat and hate sounded the same to me.” It was likely a learning disability of some kind, or it could have been the residual effect of an incident with a second grade teacher. At the very least this teacher did not help her situation. Schulte remembers that teacher telling the class they had to make the sound of every letter in the words. When the word “knife” came up, Schulte did as she was told. She pronounced the “k” and the “e,” which many of us did until we learned the rules. Apparently, her teacher was intense in indicating that was wrong.

Whether that was the cause or it was a learning disability or both, by fourth grade Schulte said she was having difficulty remembering the increasingly involved stories. Finally, her fifth grade teacher caught on. When asked how this teacher taught her to read, Schulte says, “She

118 Ibid.
worked with me every day at recess and she and I repeated the sounds over and over again until I got it.” During her last fourteen years teaching, Schulte worked with the youngest children she had taught, kindergarten to third grade. She was the reading resource teacher working with children who were having difficulty. She encountered a child who had exactly the same problem she had all those years before. Schulte said she was asked how she could be patient with that child, repeating the same thing over and over again. She said it was the easiest thing she ever did.119

Despite her short-lived attempt to save the world by becoming a nurse like her sister, Schulte admits that she really wanted to be a teacher from the time she was in grade school, her second grade teacher notwithstanding. Schulte remembers, “I played teacher all the time. I would grab whoever I could catch and take them to my house. I had a chalk board,” she says, “with real chalk, colored chalk,” her voice rising with excitement. When John and Mary Newbauer talk about Schulte, they talk about what a dedicated, terrific teacher she was, how she would keep listening to find the key to help each child to not only learn how to read, but to enjoy reading. However, they become really animated when they talk about how she would join Newbauer and the kids on the playground, her habit flowing around her, and play ball with the kids, or how she would take the children to the roller rink and skate with them for hours. John Newbauer gave me a clipping from a local paper that has a picture of Schulte. She is in the middle of a crowd of people all reaching out to Robert Kennedy, who is standing on the trunk of a car that was to take him to Concordia University, where he would be speaking. Taller than almost everyone in the crowd, Schulte also stands out as the only person wearing a habit, a big smile on her face. It looks like the photographer deliberately put her in the center of the picture.

119 Schulte interview, June 1, 2017.
Schulte looks so joyful, just like those Adrians who were her high school teachers with whom she had so much fun, the reason she joined their congregation.

At the beginning of our second conversation on June 1, 2017, I asked how she and Mary Ann Ennis were thinking about and dealing with the number of sisters who are dying; how they felt about the future of religious life. They were both hopeful about the future, about the endurance of the values they have lived with and for. There had recently been a meeting of the people who run the organizations the Adrians sponsor – universities and hospitals. They both said that meeting gave them great hope. Schulte reflects on Adrian values and that meeting:

We were taught right from the get-go, that study was a big part of the Dominican charism. I think it is one of the things that has driven us…that we don’t give up, that we pass on our values to others. When we had the conference for all of the institutes that we support with the lay people who run the organizations, they said they knew we would not be here much longer, but they wanted to make sure that they continue with the same charism. They told us how it’s affected them and the people they hire. They say that they will pass it on. I guess we don’t have to worry so much about what’s going to happen. We are dying out. There is no denying it. But our values will continue.

4 MARY PRINISKI, O.P., PH.D.

In Community in the Struggle for Justice

The progressive development of peoples is an object of deep interest and concern to the Church. This is particularly true in the case of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth.

Pope Paul VI

*Populorum Progresso – On the Development of Peoples*
Whether it is a small gathering in the backyard for a Memorial Day cookout or a gathering of 100 to testify to the miserable conditions in their small town in the southeastern United States, Mary Priniski is all about gathering people together to be present for each other. She believes that community is about responsibility – responsibility to the large Catholic family into which she was born, responsibility to the family of sisters which she chose to enter, responsibility to every community in which she has lived, and responsibility to herself and others to live the teachings of her faith – to be present, to bear witness and try in whatever ways are available to her to uphold the dignity of humankind.120

Priniski decided to enter the Adrian Dominican Congregation at a time of upheaval, in some ways a perfect time for her, a woman who seems inclined to quietly, strategically bend situations to her will. In 1968, American sisters, including the Adrian Dominicans, were undergoing an assessment of every aspect of their way of life. They were studying the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the injunctions to govern themselves collegially, to consider whether they wanted to continue to wear the habit or to wear the clothes of the communities in which they were working and living, whether they should continue as a teaching congregation or dedicate themselves to other pursuits as they tried to live the word of the Gospels. This environment of change, of confusion and dissension, formed the backdrop of the time when Priniski would be in formation, studying to become a sister.121

For Mary Priniski, her first attempt to enter the Adrian Dominican Congregation ended in great pain. In 1967, having just graduated from high school, driving to Adrian with several members of her family, Priniski was involved in a car accident. She and several other members

---
120 Mary Margaret Priniski, interviews by author, Atlanta, GA. April 26, 2016 and June 10, 2017; and Adrian, MI. July 15, 2016.
121 Schulte and Ennis interview, June 1, 2017.
of her family were severely injured. She received an injury to her hip that would cause her to limp until she was in her early 50s, when an operation finally corrected the problem. The accident delayed her entry into the Adrian Dominicans for a year. “I was a wreck” she says. “I was a wreck for years.” Nonetheless, in 1968, still in her late teens, at her father’s insistence that she drive, Priniski got back in her car with her parents, and set out once again to Adrian. Here she would start a life of discipline and study, in truth not that far removed from what she had known in her family home. Priniski would miss the warmth and support of that loving family, but they had also accustomed her to an ordered life of study, prayer, and discernment, giving her exactly the kind of solid upbringing that would help her gain a sense of purpose and make the most of the life before her. Believing she was called to do justice by the bishops who met in Vatican II and by Catholic Social Teaching, hers would be a life dedicated to walking with the marginalized in society, living and working in community.\textsuperscript{122}

4.1 A Really Catholic Family Leads to Being an Adrian Dominican Sister

We were a really Catholic family. Our time was divided between church and the school, the Catholic school. I started first grade at St. Pat’s school in Escanaba and my mother made all the curtains for the school. We went to mass every day because mass was at 8 o’clock, before school. In those days, you had to fast from midnight if you were going to communion. So, we would carry our breakfast every day and eat it at our desks after church.

Mary Priniski

Born on May 1, 1949 in Escanaba on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, Mary Priniski was the second of seven Priniski children. Her mother Alta was a teacher before she married and started having, and caring for, Priniski children. During World War II, her father Rupert designed

\textsuperscript{122} Priniski interview, April 26, 2016.
aircraft carriers. Later, during the Eisenhower Administration, Rupert created the concepts for many of Michigan’s highways.123

Music was always a part of Priniski family life. “I took piano lessons from the time I was in first grade,” Priniski remembered, “and by the time I was in third grade, I was playing the organ and singing in the choir, the kids choir.” All the Priniski children played musical instruments and sang in the church choir. The succeeding generations of Priniski offspring, having grown up singing with their parents, have continued the family tradition of playing instruments and singing together at every family event. From anniversaries to weddings and memorial services, every Priniski family gathering has a musical performance as at least some part of it. The extended family still gets together every summer and Mary Priniski tries never to miss the family reunion. She builds her summer schedule around it. Totaling up the current family members, Priniski says, “I have six sibling in-laws. I have 16 nieces and nephews. Of them, I think 9 are married. And, there are 17 or 18 great nieces and nephews.” Priniski has knitted a baby blanket for each new addition in that generation, soft, warm, cozy, and washable; the sentimental meets the practical.124

Priniski says she decided she wanted to be a nun when she was in third grade, and from the beginning, she wanted to be an Adrian sister because the Adrians were so “joyful.”125 She carries out that joyful tradition as she goes about her ministries. John Feister, one of her colleagues from her days on the J.P. Stevens organizing drive, realized, “she was always playing her guitar, singing, bringing everyone together.”126 Priniski sees her role as being present, as

123 Priniski interviews, April 26, 2016 and June 10, 2017.
125 Three of the sisters (Priniski, Ennis and Schulte) discussed the “joyfulness” of the Adrian Dominican sisters who had been their teachers as a reason to choose this congregation. When we discussed it, they pointed out that it was part of the Adrian charism
126 John Feister. interview.
walking with, being in and of the communities, and learning from them and with them as they try together to build a society in which all can thrive. She described her activism this way:

People who are poor have had to learn how to navigate a very complex system. You couldn’t just go to one place and say I need help and get food, and get clothing and get shelter. The way our society is organized there are a lot of silos, and so in order to really get what you need for your family, you had to learn how to navigate a whole system, and they did it. So who am I to come in and tell them how to live their lives. They’ve learned better than I how to live their life. So we go in as learners and support them and become a part of the community. Somebody recently asked me what made me good at what I do…what made me good at what I do, especially during that time, was that I didn’t know what I was doing. So, when you come in thinking you know everything, you are not in a way where you can walk with people. You haven’t learned to listen. You start by listening to people and learn what their lives are like and become a part of their community and doing that made me good at what I do.  

In Priniski’s first years of ministry as a sister, the Adrian Dominicans were still trying to decide whether and how they would change the culture of their congregation, including whether teaching would remain their core service. Through the 1950s, changes in state regulations and the attitude of congregations about what was required to ready a sister to teach changed the experiences of entering sisters, but they were still going to be groomed as teachers. In 1951, Maria Riley was assigned to teach immediately. By 1959, Peter Anthony Schulte was not assigned to teach immediately, but was put on a teaching track despite her request to be trained as a nurse. By 1968, post-Vatican II, it was no longer automatically assumed that a sister would teach. Unlike Riley or Schulte, Priniski was expected to finish her bachelor’s degree in theology within the usual four years. She then moved into work with parish clergy and their parishioners. She completed her first two years of undergraduate work at Siena Heights University, an Adrian Dominican Congregation sponsored university. The close proximity made it possible for her to stay close to the motherhouse, learning about her role as a sister within her community. She then

---

went on to complete her bachelor of arts degree in theology at the University of Detroit. After graduation, she would do traditional parish ministry for close to a decade.\textsuperscript{128}

In 1972, the summer after her graduation from the University of Detroit, Priniski met Les Schmidt, a Glenmary priest whose southern ministry was with the poor and with workers. At the time, his main project was helping a group of Kentucky coal miners who were struggling to form a union. This meeting would start a working partnership of more than forty years between Priniski and the Glenmary brothers. However, at this point, while Mary Priniski was intrigued, even motivated to action, she was focused on starting her first job, working at a local parish in Chicago.\textsuperscript{129}

Priniski’s first job was very traditional. She assisted the clergy with whatever they needed, including assisting with the liturgy. She created a music program for the parish children’s group, using her musical skills in addition to her theology background. After two years in Chicago, Priniski then went to work in a parish in California, where however she stayed for only one year. When asked why she left California, Priniski says, “It was too rich for me. They all [the parishioners] had too much stuff, so I moved back to the UP [Upper Peninsula of Michigan]. Then I had to find a job.”\textsuperscript{130}

She found a job, or as she related it, “then I went to hell.” Laughing, Priniski continued, “There are a kind of sister cities in the Upper Peninsula where there are two areas. One is Ishpeming and the other is Nagaunee. One is the indigenous word for heaven, and the other is the word for hell. Ishpeming is heaven and I got sent to hell.” Nagaunee was a good place with good people in its parish, but she had not yet found the work of her heart. It would be another

\textsuperscript{128} Priniski interview, June 10, 2017.
\textsuperscript{129} Priniski interview, April 26, 2016 and June 10, 2017.
\textsuperscript{130} Priniski interview, April 26, 2016.
two years before Priniski was able to leave Nagaunee and move forward with her partnership with the Glenmarys, starting down the road that would lead to the direction for the rest of her life.

The guiding philosophy that has informed her essential being springs from Liberation Theology and Catholic Social Teaching as she understands it. Priniski points to the history of Liberation Theology, “Traditional theology was Western in its formulation. Liberation Theology initially came out of Latin America, developing because of the repressive governments in the late decades of the twentieth century.” Priniski continues her explanation: “As it traveled around the world, many forms of Liberation Theology came into being, like Black Liberation Theology in North America or Latina Liberation Theology in South America. Now, Liberation Theology exists on every continent in a form that is relevant to each.” In *A Theology of Liberation*, theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez says, “Theologians will be personally and vitally engaged in historical realities with specific times and places. They will be engaged where nations, social classes, and peoples struggle to free themselves from domination and oppression by other nations, classes and peoples.”

Catholic Social Teaching evolved with the times as well. There are varying interpretations of the components of Catholic Social Teaching, changing through the decades as the church evolved, as old popes died and new popes replaced them, and as society changed. Since the end of the nineteenth century, some aspects of Catholic Social Teaching have endured – care for the poor and the marginalized, regard for the right of everyone to have decent work and a decent life, respect for the humanity and dignity of every human being. When discussing responsiveness to the changing circumstances and needs of humankind, Priniski points out the

---

relatively recent inclusion of ecology as a part of Catholic Social Teaching in the 1970s, starting with Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II, and receiving renewed emphasis in the strong call of Pope Francis to care for Mother Earth. This regard for the reality of peoples’ lived experiences, and the belief that all people are entitled to a decent life, inspires her to walk with those struggling for the well-being of their kin (however they might define kin) and seeking a sense of fairness and forgiveness for all.132

Priniski started her social justice work in 1979, a time when American workers were starting to feel the pain of automation and outsourcing, when inflation was eating away at stagnant wages and a conservative movement was claiming that the quest for racial and gender equality was moving the American people in the wrong direction. The liberal consensus was falling apart and a new set of policy priorities was becoming dominant. In the 1950s, writer and editor William F. Buckley first gave this conservative ideology a popular appeal. Presidential candidate Barry Goldwater made it politically plausible in 1964, bringing front and center the conservative idea that democratic social welfare made individuals weak and dependent on big government. The corollary, that taxes burdened for-profit enterprise and private wealth and government provided little of value in return, undermined the New Deal consensus that had existed from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy.

While Goldwater went down to defeat in 1964, the conservative movement had become ascendant by 1980. Ronald Reagan won a resounding victory in the presidential contest that year, and he brought with him to Washington and to many state governments conservative politicians, judges, policymakers, pundits, and lobbyists. His victory had real effects in the roles and relations of state, society, and economy. Undermining the New Deal-Great Society

132 Priniski interview, July 9, 2017.
advances, the prevailing policy ideas of the 1980s greatly reduced food and housing assistance for the poor; privatized many public services and cut many public-sector jobs that had provided decent pay and benefits for women and people of color who were often discriminated against in private-sector employment. The Reagan, Clinton and Bush Administrations deregulated many industries in the private sector, leading to monopolistic practices in energy, air travel, health care, communications, banking, and finance, as well as eliminating many labor protections and environmental controls. Eventually, in the cause of smaller government and greater faith in the private sector, federal and state governments privatized prisons. With two million Americans incarcerated, the US per capita prison population exceeded that of all other nations. As they dismantled the social safety net, succeeding administrations increased military budgets proportionally. By the 1990s, the US was once again engaged in wars that were killing young American men and women and hundreds of thousands of civilians in poor countries around the world.

4.2 Americans Begin a Long Period of Painful Economic Retrenchment

As this conservative pro-family movement gained traction in the late 1970s, breadwinner liberalism was coming further undone. Real wages stagnated, inflation reached double digits, trade unions were on the back foot, the war on poverty was a memory, and more families than at any point since World War II depended on two or more incomes. None of the decade’s three presidents – Nixon, Ford, and Carter – could fully halt the slide, and the political class as a whole pursued policies that led the nation closer to abandoning its commitments to government economic regulation, wage support, and the social contract.

Robert O. Self
All in the Family

Historian Robert Self believes the political and ideological contests starting in the 1970s and continuing in the contemporary period, represent a clash between “breadwinner liberalism” and “breadwinner conservatism.” Self sees both formations as coming from an American
patriarchal concept of the family, in which a white, heterosexual father works to pay for the necessities of life, while his white, heterosexual wife takes care of husband, children, and household needs. Calling this notion of the American family “a national mythology,” Self believes its unreality is “immaterial to its staying power” in public discourse as the crux of conflict in American political and moral life.

The difference between the liberal and conservative concepts of the breadwinner family lies in how each envisions the role of the family within society and what policies best promote that role. Self posits that liberals of the 1960s like President Lyndon B. Johnson, Sargent Shriver, the Peace Corps’ first director and a Johnson Administration official, and New York Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan who also served in the Nixon Administration, saw themselves as promoting policies that helped families achieve middle-class status. He contends that Reagan and Reaganism in the 1980s discredited the ideas behind “breadwinner liberalism,” and replaced them with the values of “breadwinner conservatism.” By 2004, Self argues, “the nuclear family was a conservative emblem…and instead of crafting policies to extend opportunity to new segments of society, conservatives endeavored to defend families from what they cast as moral threats.” This led to the elimination of programs to aid the poor and middle-class families, whether food, housing, or health care, and to overcome the effects of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sex, or sexual orientation in education, employment, and other areas. Concomitantly, the conservative movement enshrined the neoliberal idea that American freedom meant self-reliance, abjuring help from a government that should in any case pursue a very limited mission to provide security, protect private property and commercial rights in a free-market capitalist society of “rugged” individuals.133

By the late 1970s, Priniski and many other Catholic sisters were motivated to activism by the increasing disparities engendered by both external and internal strains on the American dream of opportunity and prosperity. Oil shocks, recessions, and stagflation added economic insecurity to social and moral anxiety in American life. Job losses due to automation or plant relocation to other parts of the US or abroad were already a problem, and every indicator suggested these causes of structural unemployment were only going to grow. In a recitation of the frightening statistics Americans were facing during this period, historian Jefferson Cowie points out, “In 1975, the unemployment rate had shot up to 8.5 from only 3.5 percent in 1969, setting the record high for the postwar era to that date (it would be surpassed again in 1980). The inflation rate was 9.2 percent in 1975, which had fallen since 1974’s record of 11 percent (a figure that would again be topped at the end of the decade).” The problem of stagflation was particularly perplexing in a society accustomed to Keynesian management of capitalism’s boom-and-bust cycles.134

If economic change was disorienting, especially for white Americans, the seeming overthrow of racial and gender hierarchies threatened to remove what material and social privileges they enjoyed over their “others.” The Civil Rights and Black Power movements and the second wave of feminism, from the radicals of Women’s Liberation to the progressives of the National Organization for Women (NOW), not to mention the advocates of lesbian and gay liberation, were calling into question the whole idea of white, heterosexual male leadership. Liberals and conservatives may have been “all in the family,” but now, the conventional “breadwinner” family was apparently falling apart.

By the end of the 1970s, the conservative movement and its base felt deeply aggrieved by three decades of what they saw as an assault on Western, Christian values, but were buoyed by the sense that many Americans were coming to agree with their grievances. Their objections included supposedly out-of-control budget deficits, taxes so high they were quashing economic growth, liberal efforts to force economic and social equality through affirmative action and equal opportunity employment rules, and attacks on religious and family “values” that had been the foundations of American family life and American society as they understood it. In this political, economic, and cultural terrain, the conservative movement saw an opening. Political scientist John W. Sloan outlines how conservatives used this sense of dislocation to their political advantage: “Ideologically committed, well financed, facilitated by the latest techniques of direct mail and communications, conservatives felt that they were riding the crest of a political wave, their truths spreading like a ‘prairie fire.’ By the 1980s, conservatives believed they were ready to implement their policy agenda.”

This conservative policy agenda included an escalation of initiatives going back to the postwar decades to impede organized labor, especially preventing the spread of unionization in the Southeast and Southwest. The rise of civil rights and community labor approaches to building unions became a serious possibility in the border states and the Deep South in the late 1960s and 70s. During this same time, leaders of women and men religious were thinking through how to respond to the calls for justice coming from bishops in Rome and in the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the US. Priniski too had been inspired by the words that came out of the Synod of Bishops in 1971, when they published *Justice in the World*. The bishops write “the duty” of Catholics is to “proclaim justice on the social, national, and

---

international level.” The *Synod* went further, calling upon Christians to denounce injustice and calling it the responsibility of the church and Christians to “give witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the Gospel messages.”¹³⁶ The bishops were building on Vatican II documents, exhorting Catholics to do justice in the world. These exhortations were inspiring hundreds of men and women religious to seek ministries among the marginalized.

From the viewpoint of someone undaunted by challenges and inspired to join the struggle for economic and social justice, what better time to go South and join the fight for workers’ rights? Talking about this life-changing decision, Priniski said, “At the time there was this sense that if anybody should be involved with justice issues, we should, because we didn’t have as much to lose. We didn’t have families. We didn’t have jobs we absolutely had to keep. So, there was a real move to ‘stand with the least in the struggle for justice.’”¹³⁷

Thus Priniski left the safety of the Upper Peninsula, leaving a parish in a town called hell to go into a real purgatory of sorts – a bitterly fought, high-profile union organizing campaign at a J.P. Stevens plant in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Her job would be advocating within the religious community for the campaign. Her ministry with the Stevens workers would begin a decades-long focus on the struggle for justice in local communities for workers, the poor, and the marginalized. In 1979, finally in a position to move, knowing her community of sisters would be there if she needed them, and still in contact with Fr. Les Schmidt, who was continuing his ministry in the South, Priniski once again got in a car and took off for the unknown.

### 4.3 Being Present to Bear Witness While Taking Action Against Injustice

Desire to ‘stand with the least in the struggle for justice’ led Priniski to Southerners for Economic Justice, a group that links labor and civil rights

---


¹³⁷ Priniski interview, April 26, 2016.
organizing. As an SEJ organizer, she assisted ACTWU at Rock Hill’s J.P. Stevens plant and works with blacks protesting police brutality in nearby Chester, S.C., and Catawba Indians fighting to get compensation for land – some of it now owned by the Catholic Church…Since Mary Priniski moved to Rock Hill, she has seen the ACTWU send organizers into the local Stevens plant, pull them out, send them in again, and pull them out again. The union probably has no other choice. It faces an impossible task, organizing the Southern textile industry, with pitifully limited resources. But Priniski is in Rock Hill simply to serve the poor, not to achieve any particular organizing goal. She can wait.

Steve Askin
“In the South, Catholic activists work for justice outside Church”
National Catholic Reporter

By 1979, Mary Priniski had been determined for some time to get involved in the social justice movement. Still in Nagaunee, an iron mining area, Priniski was somewhat familiar with the life of Michigan miners. Her father had started out his working life in a mine in the Upper Peninsula. While serving in this parish she would use the advent calendar or the parish bulletin to put the word out about the harsh conditions in the mines and the impact of the mines on the local ecology. Priniski was also still in communication with the Glenmarys, including Fr. Les Schmidt, who was keeping her updated with information on the Kentucky organizing drive, the difficult life of those miners and the harsh tactics of the mine owners opposed to pushing back on the campaign and any negotiation on its claims.138

At the point at which she was able to act on her desire to become involved, to do justice as the bishops were urging, Priniski turned to Schmidt for advice. He indicated there were a couple of options open in the South. Both involved textile workers. One was a VISTA job working on brown lung disease, a devastating respiratory disease caused by inhaling cotton dust, which afflicted textile workers by the thousands due to improper ventilation in mills. The other

was to assist the organizing drive at a J. P. Stevens plant in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Priniski had to time her departure from her existing position so as not to create disruption in the parish. That determined her decision to choose the Rock Hill assignment. She and her soon-to-be housemate, Alice Wilber, found a house to rent in an old mill village and set up housekeeping.\footnote{Priniski interview, April 26, 2016.}

The Rock Hill plant was part of a larger battle Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU) was fighting throughout the Carolinas and parts of Georgia. In \textit{Stayin’ Alive}, Jefferson Cowie calls the J. P. Stevens campaign, “the poster child for advocates of labor law reform.” According to Cowie, labor leaders saw the devolution of labor law, starting in 1947 with the passage of the Taft Hartley Act, as a major reason for the decline in unionization. Labor reform looked to them like the solution to bring unionization back to previous levels.

Cowie goes on to cite civil rights leaders such as Bayard Rustin and Norman Hill as believing that labor law reform was also an important part of obtaining racial equality in the only slowly desegregating South. Cowie says:

\begin{quote}
    The focal point for labor law reform efforts therefore focused, not surprisingly, on a southern case - the J. P. Stevens campaign….Among the remarkable labor insurgencies of the early seventies was the successful drive at the J. P. Stevens textile plan in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina…The South, where organizing had been hobbled by the problems of race and employer militancy, had been the labor movement’s weak link for generations…In a dramatic inter-racial struggle in 1974…the workers broke through the textile industry’s vicious anti-unionism and won the election at the plant in Roanoke Rapids.\footnote{Jefferson Cowie, \textit{Stayin’ Alive: the 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class} (New York: The New Press, 2010), 290}
\end{quote}

That Roanoke Rapids victory inspired the union to keep going and Rock Hill became part of a larger and growing struggle. Throughout this long regional campaign, Stevens leadership engaged in actions that brought them defeat after defeat before the National Labor Relations Board administrative law judges. In 1980, the issue of egregious actions by J.P. Stevens reached...
the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. The appellate court found in favor of the union and ordered J. P. Stevens to reinstate an employee who had been improperly fired, pay back wages, and scrub any detrimental material from the employee’s file. The unjust treatment meted out to the employee was part of a larger set of issues that engendered the complaint. In that same order, the court found communication to employees from the company to be in violation of the law and part of a larger pattern and practice of violations. The court ordered the company to post notices correcting the illegal communications and permitted the union organizers access to the plant. This permission was a significant win for the union and its supporters among the workers. Getting access to employees in a private workplace was an important opportunity for the union, and it covered the Rock Hill plant.141

Priniski and the Southern Economic Justice (SEJ) team were acting as community liaisons charged mainly with bringing the churches around to supporting the organizing effort. Writing in *Southern Spaces*, Joey Fink described the role SEJ would play in the campaign, “SEJs organizing carried ACTWU’s message through networks the union could not or would not work through. Support from preachers, churchwomen, and priests infused the Stevens campaign with a moral urgency and righteous indignation.”142

For many years, the Catholic Church in Rock Hill was identified with the Oratory, a group of Catholic brothers and priests who were known for doing good work in the community. Working in a community which was not always welcoming to Catholics, Priniski benefitted from


the reputation the Oratory had built on behalf of the Catholic community in Rock Hill and from her low-key approach. Priniski was a diligent observer and listener who did not lead by introducing herself as a Catholic sister where it would not be helpful. To better represent the workers to religious leaders and their parishioners, Priniski would join the organizers in the plant cafeteria during the night shift to hear the workers’ stories, to find out about their lives and their families. She wanted to internalize what winning the union meant to the workers so she could faithfully and fully represent them to the religious community, to be the best advocate she could be.  

Still, Priniski and the many ACTWU organizers working in and around Rock Hill knew they were engaged in a daunting, uphill climb. Discussing the strength of anti-unionism that had defeated Operation Dixie, the CIO’s organizing drive in the postwar South, the authors of *Like a Family* state:

Southern legislators, unhindered by working-class bargaining power, led a postwar attack on labor’s legislative gains. The unorganized South remained a mecca for runaway shops and...a constant source of cheap labor. Within this environment, textile manufacturers intensified the [anti-union] strategies they had developed in the 1920s and 1930s.  

In the Steven’s campaign decades later, the owners appealed quite directly to white supremacist insecurities, sending out verbal and written messages asking white workers to think about what it would be like working for African-American supervisors, an eventuality the owners reminded the white workers was possible if the union became involved in promotion. In addition to those usual racist appeals, Stevens’s management also threatened to close the plant if the workers voted for the union, an alarming threat given the number of plants that were moving...

---

143 Priniski interview, April 26, 2016.
to Mexico from the South at that time, in addition to the fear of job loss to automation. The authors of *Like a Family* discuss automation as well, noting, “Neither the unions nor the federal government went…to the deeper questions of mechanization and labor control. The result, by the 1970s, was a wholesale replacement of people by machines.”

To the great disappointment of Priniski, organizers, and so many of the workers, the Stevens anti-union activities paid off. Made fearful by Stevens’s threats to close the plant if the union was voted in and divided by racially charged material, the workers voted down the union by a vote of 433 to 299. Reporting on the Stevens’s anti-labor activities at Rock Hill and a last ditch move by ACTWU to overturn the election results, Sandra Salmans wrote in *The New York Times*, that Bruce Raynor, ACTWU’s Atlanta-based Regional Director, complained about the difficulty of keeping track of employees as part of the campaign, saying that Rock Hill traditionally hired and fired people so readily that he did not know if he could submit the proof needed to win the union’s NLRB case against the Rock Hill plant. He was right; they lost the NLRB case as well. The following year, even without the union victory, the owners closed the plant because keeping it open would require purchase of entirely new equipment to meet modern standards for the production of denim, which was the plant’s only product. The owners believed such an upgrade of machinery would not be as cost effective as starting over by opening and equipping a new plant.

---

145 Ibid., 354.
148 Priniski interviews, April 26, 2016 and June 10, 2017.
4.4 Deaths of Three Black Men Lead to New Battles - New Friends

Mary, she was always moving. It was really hard to keep up with her. She was making sure everything was right and everything was the way it was supposed to be.

Annie Peterson
South Carolina community and civil rights organizer

Undaunted by the difficulty of the union struggle and by its ultimate defeat, Mary was already engaged in other social justice action in the community. While the union fight was in full swing, she heard about the deaths of young black men in Chester, South Carolina, not far from Rock Hill. The first young man was found hanged with a dog collar around his neck and his hands tied behind his back. It was deemed a suicide by the local authorities. The second young black man to die was found at the bottom of a flight of stairs, his head through a plate glass window, his throat cleanly cut. It was ruled an accident. The body of the third man, Mickey McClinton, was found badly mangled on a road. Initially called a hit-and-run case, a subsequent court-ordered exhumation and autopsy showed that he had been shot twice in the back and dragged behind a vehicle of some kind, then left in the middle of the road. The African American community wanted an investigation, wanted murder to be formally declared the cause of death, and wanted the perpetrators brought to justice.¹⁴⁹

Chester was far from unique in experiencing racial violence in the late 1970s. While at the time of the Chester killings Jim Crow segregation had been illegal since 1964, there were still major setbacks in economic and social equality for African Americans and racial violence was and is still a serious problem. In his 1998 memoir, Congressman John Lewis talked about the changing situation for African Americans, but also about the many aspects of black life that had

¹⁴⁹ Annie Peterson and Jeanette Lightener, interview by author, Spartanburg, SC. August 9, 2016.
not changed: “The statistics are numbingly familiar. The proportion of poor blacks is still three times that of poor whites. Unemployment rates for black males are double that of whites. The rate of death from homicide is six times higher for black males than for whites.”¹⁵⁰

Consequently, the South Carolina in which Priniski found herself in the late 1970s and 80s, like most states in the Deep South, was a place in which civil rights battles received less attention, but remained intense. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in the person of Golden Frinks, was organizing in the Piedmont country of South Carolina. In the midst of his work, Mickey McClinton was found dead. Three young black men found dead in very suspicious circumstances were three too many. Angered by the seeming total lack of interest by local authorities, Annie Peterson and her neighbors started meeting, trying to decide what, if anything, they could do to bring to light what really happened and to see if they could get justice for these men. Frinks heard about these meetings and came to Chester. So did Mary Priniski and Alice Wilber. Annie Peterson and her daughter, Jeanette Lightener, talked about the first time they saw Priniski and Wilber at one of their meetings:

Peterson: We had people coming from everywhere, now when Mary came, I’m sitting there and I see two white women, now why are they here, what’s going on? Are they here to find out what’s going on? But that was what I was thinking.

Lightener: We didn’t have any white people participating.

Peterson: So, we figured they were spies.¹⁵¹

This Chester group eventually decided on a big event to capture the attention of the state and, if possible, the national press. The group decided to march from Chester to the state capitol building in Columbia, a 55-mile march. The group started out on Friday, October 11, 1979 with

¹⁵¹ Annie Peterson and Jeannette Lightener interview, August 9, 2016.
about 100 people. They picked up supporters along the way, stopping at a church on Friday and Saturday nights, and arriving in Columbia on Sunday. Peterson estimates that with the addition of students from schools in Columbia, they numbered about 2,000 by the time they got to the steps of the capitol. The march had secured enough media coverage to motivate the governor, Dick Riley, to meet with them on Sunday. While no one was prosecuted for the crimes, there was an investigation. McClinton’s body was exhumed and the evidence of murder, including two bullet wounds, was clear and declared.¹⁵² For the group at this time, the meeting with Governor Riley was in itself a significant victory. Securing the investigation and getting an honest result promulgated was actually more than they initially thought they could achieve.¹⁵³

When asked what she did there, Priniski said, “I was just there, just being present.” Annie and her daughter saw it differently. They saw Mary as always having ideas about people with whom they could connect, from whom they could get resources. For Mary, she saw an opportunity to make a difference by being there, by bearing witness. Priniski believes strongly in the concept that just being in some place, taking part in some way, just “being present” can make change. “And we went and we would rally with them,” she said. Then she added, “Ultimately what happened was some of the people from the civil rights group started to work with the people at the mill and vice versa. Somebody asked me what was your biggest accomplishment this year and I said it was getting those two groups to work their struggles together.”¹⁵⁴

By 1981, Priniski was also involved in re-establishing and reactivating the Catholic Committee of the South, an organization dedicated to working with Catholic institutions to

¹⁵² “Protestors Near the End of March,” and “Riley to Expand McClinton Probe” *Rock Hill Herald* (October 12, and October 13, 1979).
¹⁵³ Peterson interview, August 9, 2016.
¹⁵⁴ Priniski interview, June 10, 2017.
promote social justice in the region. She has been a leader of the organization for close to four decades, continuing to promote their involvement in societal issues that can be affected by Catholic voices.\textsuperscript{155}

4.5 Catholic Justice Institution Forced to Close Is Re-established

We sincerely hope that the day will come when the ideal of Christian Brotherhood will displace from our southern scene all traces of the blight of racism….The time for action is now. – To bring Christ to the South and the South to Christ.

Message of the Bishops, 1953
To the Convention of the Catholic Committee of the South

Founded in 1939, the mission of the Catholic Committee of the South (CCS) was to effect “social change in the modern South through the use of religious principles.” From 1941 to 1955, CCS held annual conventions of southern bishops that counted among their presenters not only church leaders, but also leaders of women religious, leaders of other religions in the South, as well as union and political leaders. They held integrated conventions. They set up workshops on social activism for local southern priests, sponsored summer programs for seminarians and passed resolutions supporting the rights of workers to organize, urging southern Catholics to participate in changing the South.

However, most of the bishops had left CCS by 1955, driven away by a combination of Cold War political paranoia and the racist violence attendant upon the emergence of an open, assertive Civil Rights Movement. The slow dissolution of CCS had begun two years earlier, in 1953, when the bishops had strongly pointed to the Christian teaching that called all Catholics to end Jim Crow. Despite this retrenchment, the grassroots organizations of the Southern justice

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
movements continued to desire a way to network, to provide mutual support and shared learning. By 1980, the Glenmary Home Missioners were working to get that done.¹⁵⁶

Mary Priniski has been a major force in implementing CCS projects and programs from the early 1980s to today. That work began for her while she was living in Rock Hill. CCS creates opportunities for organizations in communities throughout the South to work together, from indigenous peoples’ organizations to activists in small black communities to healthcare and social workers. While they nurture those connections constantly, the highlight of the year was and is a gathering of people involved in this work, a time to share stories of success or frustration, to learn from each other, to identify opportunities to share sparse resources and to just make new friends. These gatherings started in 1981 and are still an annual event for CCS.

For over ten years, Priniski was one of two sisters who handled the logistics, prepared the agenda, acted as the host, and made sure there was beer and wine in the evening. She also played her guitar to get things started and close the day out. She explains the gatherings:

It was a celebration of what was happening in their communities and it helped local folks learn from other local folks from across the South. We usually had between 80 and 120 people at these gatherings. They would come in any time they could on Friday night and we would have a social. On Saturday, all day there would be testimony of what was going on in their neighborhoods and then in the evening we would have a cultural sharing, where people would come and lead music and tell stories or we would do poetry or dance or whatever for the evening. And, then it would be over. Sunday morning, people would have breakfast and leave, going back to their communities and do their work.¹⁵⁷

John Feister, who was hired by her to travel the South working with local social justice and church organizations, remembers Priniski as one of the two main organizers of the gatherings, but also as the person who was responsible for keeping the organization running

¹⁵⁶ The American Catholic Research Center and University Archives, Catholic University of America, Catholic Committee of South Collection – Box 326-3, Folder General: History and Timeline, 1978, 1980s, “Catholic Committee of the South Timeline.”
between gatherings. “Mary was the one who made sure things happened,” Feister remembered. “She held everything together, got the people, ran the organization.” The program Feister is talking about is Connective Ministries, a network of local community organizers that Priniski created and maintained for the Catholic Committee of the South.

In the 1980s, Mary Priniski developed and implemented a program for Connective Ministries called “Walk Together, Children.” It became a focus of her dissertation for her doctorate in missiology, the study of the mission of the church and the nature of missionary work, for which Priniski tested the program and reported on the results. “Walk Together, Children” was a four-week training program that helped staff members of social service organizations who were going into new communities to work effectively with poor clients. Priniski used the program to demonstrate the six process elements that she posits will facilitate a change in staff members way of thinking and acting from outsiders providing services, to true members of the community sharing life and work. She put forward these process elements as “changing perspective to include the world view of the poor and the marginalized”:

1) becoming aware of cultural and social contexts;
2) having direct experience of poor people as peers and teachers;
3) reflecting on that experience;
4) receiving support for the change of perspective from a small community;
5) transforming the religious and spiritual life of the missioner; and
6) being able to count on institutional support for the change of perspective and its consequences by the congregation or church.

In her dissertation, Priniski talks about the results of this work for one of the program participants, “Madeline Gianforte is a Sister of St. Agnes who attended ‘Walk Together, Children’… Madeline changed ministries and moved to Mississippi,” Priniski wrote. She

---

158 Feister interview, June 3, 2017.
159 Mary Margaret Priniski, “A Process of Conversion to the Perspective of the Poor,” (The Union Institute, 1992, Ph.D dissertation), 81.
continues, “Her [Gianforte’s] reflection on the difference in her move as a result of “Walk Together, Children” is that she entered the community in a gentler way. She saw her role as learning how to be present to people in openness and honesty rather than in accomplishing a task. Her approach…was as an encourager and supporter rather than as a doer.”  

Priniski believes in and acts upon the concept of “walking with,” rather than the “I’m here to help you” idea of service that sets the missioner apart from the community, seeing him/herself as coming from “above,” being the charitable giver of knowledge and largess. This “walking with” philosophy is central to the way Priniski has carried out her work. 

**4.6 Walking the Trail of Tears as Respect and Remembrance**

Long time we travel on way to new land. People feel bad when they leave Old Nation. Women cry and made sad wails. Children cry and many men cry, and all look sad like when friends die, but they say nothing and just put heads down and keep on go towards West. Many days pass and people die very much. 

A Cherokee Account from the Oklahoman, 1929  
Cited by John Ehle in 
*Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation, 1988*  
As quoted in “Return of the Trail of Tears,” *Archaeology*

In *Empires in World History*, Burbank and Cooper point out the irony of the fate of the Cherokees: They had done everything right according to standards of the settlers surrounding them and encroaching on Cherokee land. They had “formed their own government, and written a constitution for themselves,” thereby qualifying themselves as “politically mature, able to give their nation a legal structure, but their assertiveness was considered dangerous and their lands inside the boundaries of the state of Georgia were coveted by white Americans.” That last fact,

---

160 Ibid., 156-157.  
161 Priniski interview, July 15, 2016.
that white Americans coveted their lands, where gold was discovered and which was excellent farm land, was undoubtedly their undoing.\textsuperscript{162}

As many as 4,000 Cherokee died in forced marches of approximately 900 miles to Oklahoma, where the US government created a reservation. They were also held in internment camps before they left Georgia, about 1,000 leaving at a time, and they were held in internment camps along the way. Writing for \textit{Archaeology}, Marion Blackburn, who holds an MA in public administration, laments the neglect of the history of the Trail of Tears: “Through neglect and distrust, this sad chapter has been at risk of fading from collective memory, taking with it any chance to understand the relationships between refugees and soldiers, and cultural information about the Cherokee themselves – what they carried, how they traveled, why they died.”\textsuperscript{163}

For Cleto Montelongo, getting this story in front of as many Americans as possible was a driving ambition. Montelongo, an indigenous American of Cherokee heritage, decided the best way to get some attention to this devastating chapter of American history was to set up a march that would retrace the Trail of Tears. Mary Priniski turned out to be willing and able to help him.

Still in Rock Hill at the time, Mary Priniski met a group of indigenous Americans and some of their friends, and began joining them for “sweat lodge ceremonies.”\textsuperscript{164} Through this group, Priniski was introduced to Montelongo. Having met her and despite the fact that he lived in Atlanta and Priniski was in South Carolina, he turned to her to handle the logistics of the march. The group set out the day after Thanksgiving, in 1992. They left from Echota, Georgia,\textsuperscript{162} Burbank and Cooper, \textit{Empires in World History}, 263.\textsuperscript{163} Marion Blackburn, “Return to the Trail of Tears,” \textit{Archaeology} 65, no. 2 (March/April 2012): 53-55.\textsuperscript{164} A Native American tradition that grew out of the perceived need to purify the body that had been corrupted by European habits, such as the use of alcohol, it is explained here or go to: http://www.barefootsworld.net/sweatlodge.html (accessed June 20, 2017).
an historic Cherokee site that at the time of the removal of the Cherokee was their capital. It is about 71 miles outside of Atlanta. They arrived on New Year’s Eve at Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the site where the original Trail of Tears March ended. The next day, New Year’s Day 1993, they had a commemorative event in downtown Tulsa. Priniski estimates that around 10 to 15 people walked the entire 900 miles. Along the way people would join or drop off, with 100 participants being the estimated largest number of walkers at any given time.165

Priniski played multiple roles in the march. First, she successfully approached her congregation for funding for the march. She worked with Montelongo on the planning of the action. They researched and devised the route together and worked out where they might best be able to stop overnight and where along the way they could set up interviews for Montelongo and some of the other participants. During the march, Priniski went ahead of the group to the locations they were expecting to reach over the subsequent several days. She found churches or other accommodations where the group could spend the night, preferably without charge, and freshen up for the next leg of the journey. She would also try to get food donated or find a place where the marchers could eat relatively inexpensively.166

After the Trail of Tears event, Priniski moved to Atlanta to take over the position of research director for the Glenmary Home Missioners. She would work with the Glenmarys for the rest of the 1990s, during which time she would assist the southern bishops in producing two very important pastoral documents by the end of the decade.

4.7 Walking with Bishops Toward Justice for Prisoners and Workers

This pastoral letter is about awareness, not answers. It is about our willingness to struggle with the questions of living as children of God. It is about our

166 Ibid.
willingness to open our eyes and hearts to God’s presence in people we may never meet, but whose lives are as important as ours are in the sight of God.

Catholic Bishops of the South
Voices and Choices

By 2000, Priniski was working through CCS to assist the southern bishops in writing and promulgating pastoral letters on workplace and criminal justice issues. “Eight Pastoral Statements on the Criminal Justice Process and a Gospel Response,” takes on private prisons, mass incarceration, juvenile justice, women prisoners, and post-release problems, among other issues. “Putting more people in prison and putting more people to death has not given Americans the security we seek,” the bishops agreed. “Our Catholic approach begins with the recognition that our belief in the dignity of each human person applies to both victim and offender. As Catholics, we are convinced that our tradition and our faith offer better alternatives than the slogans and policy clichés of conservatives and liberals.”

The pastoral letter Priniski believes had the most traction, bringing considerable attention to the plight of workers in the poultry industry, was “Voice and Choices: A Pastoral Message on Justice in the Workplace,” again signed by the Catholic bishops of the South. Poultry workers are paid minimum wage, the work is dangerous and exhausting and the environment is filthy. Recognizing the demographics of the industry, “Voices and Choices” was written in both English and Spanish. It looked at the industry from the viewpoints of those involved in every aspect of poultry production, from farmers, to factory owners, to the workers. This pastoral letter was impactful in part because it was well researched. The bishops backed up the letter’s ideas and charges with statistics from government and academic reports, as well as from the experiences of the people working in the industry. When discussing worker rights, the bishops

---

said, “According to a 1997 study by the Department of Labor, 60 percent of poultry companies surveyed were found in violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act.” In addition to unfair labor practices, the industry also took maximum financial advantage of poultry farmers, which were at best low margin businesses. Discussing the plight of farmers, the bishops pointed to a Securities and Exchange Commission report, “[The] poultry companies gain about 16 percent on their investment, while poultry growers gain about four percent. Delmarva poultry growers surveyed in 1997…43 percent said they did not trust their company’s feed delivery weights, 41 percent don’t trust the figures on their pay statements and 57 percent believe the company will retaliate if they raise concern.” While the poultry processors thrived, the workers and farmers suffered.

4.8 Worker Justice Becomes Central to Priniski Again

Human labor itself must always be seen in its true dignity, and workers must never be treated as mere automata in the organization of a complex productive process.

Pope John XXIII

*Mater et Magistra*

As quoted in *The Documents of Vatican II*

In 2000, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) was deeply involved in a hospital organizing campaign that included the Catholic hospitals. While congregations no longer had direct control of operations in most of the Catholic hospitals, the union’s initial approach was to send sisters, many in their 80s, videos accusing them of violating Catholic Social Teaching by mistreating their employees and attempting to deny them their right to organize. The union hoped this and other similar tactics would persuade the sisters to pressure the hospitals’ administrators to stop their anti-union campaigns. Instead, this combative

---

approach deeply offended many of these Catholic sisters, who, when they had been responsible for operations, sincerely believed they had conducted themselves in accordance with their faith. A fair assessment or not, to suggest otherwise was to accuse them of abandoning the principles that they believed had guided their life. The Adrian Dominican Congregation sponsors two hospital systems that are part of Catholic Healthcare West. Some of their sisters were on the receiving end of these tactics.

Aware of Priniski’s work with the Stevens plant in South Carolina and her work on labor issues with CCS, as well as her affiliation with a congregation that sponsored hospitals, the Healthcare Division of SEIU asked her if she could assist them by acting as liaison with Catholic hospital leadership, especially the sister hospital sponsors. Priniski balked at working directly for the union, believing a union title would not necessarily be helpful in her approach to the hospital sponsors. However, Interfaith Worker Justice, an organization for which she was a board member, appreciated the possibilities underlying SEIU’s idea and hired Priniski to engage as religious liaison, working independently on their behalf but in coordination with the union.¹⁶⁹

It was a rocky time. For those within Priniski’s congregation who were administrators in these hospitals, Priniski’s work with SEIU was not appropriate for an Adrian Dominican sister. She was, after all, engaged in these pro-union activities when the objects of the labor campaign were some of their own hospitals. Priniski understood their reactions, but disagreed. Since she also disagreed with some of the approaches the union had taken, which she saw as misdirected and, therefore, counterproductive, Priniski believed she was ideally placed to be an intermediary in this situation. She understood not only the position of each side, but had empathy with the emotions of both sides.

Eventually, the attitude of some of the leadership of her congregation that she was acting against their interests made her ability to act as liaison untenable. She ended her work as a liaison with the hospital campaign, but took up similar work for SEIU through Interfaith Worker Justice in a childcare workers campaigns. Improving the working conditions for this group required an exemption from anti-trust laws. This was the case because there was no overarching corporate or government entity to which the workers were attached and each worker was actually a licensed business enterprise, completely unlike a licensed professional individual such as a nurse or a therapist. As a consequence, coming together as an organized group was considered collusion under the law. In Massachusetts, that campaign went to a referendum and the union lost.\textsuperscript{170}

Still, it led to Priniski’s next position, as the executive secretary of the Boston Catholic Labor Guild. The position had been held by a priest who died after decades in that job. Priniski made major changes in the Guild’s administrative processes, while maintaining the connections between the Greater Boston labor community and the church. She held that job for only one year, when, in 2008, the sitting Adrian Dominican Mid-Atlantic Chapter Priorress died and Priniski was elected to that position for a six-year term.\textsuperscript{171}

4.9 Serving Her Family of Sisters and Her Catholic Community

In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of peoples are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.

Pope Francis

\textit{Laudato Si}

\textsuperscript{170} Priniski interview, July 15, 2016.
\textsuperscript{171} Priniski interview, June 10, 2017.
Returning to Atlanta where the chapter office was located, for the first time since 1979, Priniski was no longer involved in social justice work. However, she was responsible for the budgets, healthcare and general well-being of 62 sisters. Most lived in the South, but some lived in the state of Washington and in the Midwest. Four sisters lived and worked abroad in a school in Kenya. By 2015, she was ready for a rest and a new challenge. After a sabbatical, Priniski began a new project – Gathering for Mission.172

Gathering for Mission is a five-year project of the Catholic Committee of the South. Priniski is the director of the project, which is dedicated to engaging church leadership on all levels with the voice and vision of Pope Francis. The project is in its first full year, working with bishops and engaged in training programs for them and for priests and seminarians. The team trains participants in how to advance the ideas of Pope Francis, ideas with which Priniski has a lifetime of affinity – stewardship of the earth, walking with the poor and the marginalized, supporting the rights of workers, ecumenism, and a fundamental belief in social and economic justice for all the peoples of the world, whatever community, country, continent or hemisphere they may inhabit.173

Promoting a dialogic process, the Gathering for Mission brochure quotes Pope Francis about the importance of encounter and exchange in a spirit of openness: “The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another. We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect.”174 This is a time when all sides, on every issue, appear to be screaming at each other from their corners. Now, when Americans seem to be turning inward, some even trying to

172 Priniski interview, July 15, 2016.
close the US to the millions of displaced persons around the world who are desperately seeking refuge, dialogue is a much-needed technique to bridge our fractious divides. Gathering for Mission is dedicated to bringing that process to the church, and perhaps through the church, to larger circles of American society, in an effort to foster deep thought about what we claim we are as a society – one founded on equality and justice – and what we need to do to truly be that society.

4.10 Four Decades “Being Present” for Justice

I like to call myself a cheerleader. There was a time when we were talking about the ministry of presence…It means you’re there and something happens. You don’t necessarily make it happen, but you’re present and maybe your presence is the catalyst that can make it happen. But, you’re not doing it necessarily. You might be a part of it, but its your presence, your being there, showing up that’s important. I show up.

Mary Priniski
Interview, July 15, 2016

For almost forty years, Mary Priniski has shown up to contribute to communities around the US, mostly in the South, to support those struggling as they live in poverty, face discrimination, suffer in ecologically blighted communities, or simply need a hand reached out in solidarity and friendship. She says she has just been “present,” the concept that just being some place, taking part in some way can make change happen. Those who have worked with her, like Annie Peterson, John Feister, Les Schmidt, and her family of Adrian Dominican sisters would say as Annie did, “Mary is always moving, making sure things are just right.”

Now, as many elderly sisters are declining and dying, Priniski says that she and sisters around the US are called to two missions, to be both hospice workers and midwives. She says they are hospice workers for their sisters who are dying, who are on that journey. They are

175 Annie Peterson interview.
midwives to help the sisters who are coming into religious life. They may be few in number compared to the hundreds who entered in the middle of the last century. However, they are just as committed to their calling and Priniski sees exciting possibilities in their future.

She is very clear that the future will be the religious life the next generations of sisters will create. As she considers that the sisters entering are mostly women of color, mostly born outside of the US, she says, “perhaps they may be able to be witnesses to how communities of mixed cultures and mixed races can live together productively and well.”

Mary Margaret Priniski continues living as she always has, being present for both her families and for the people she walks with.

You know, everybody has more than one obligation in their lives…Everybody is engaged in community some way. You can’t be a human being and not be engaged in community in some way. So, it depends on whether or not you are going to take some responsibility. You know one of the principles of Catholic teaching is that we have rights, but those have corresponding responsibilities and one thing I read recently is that the responsibility is to the common good because we are inextricably linked, person and commons, we are social beings. So, we have obligations.

5 EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

Honoring Tradition by Imagining the Future

In the old elm farmhouse on this site, six Dominican nuns opened St. Joseph Hospital and home for the Aged May 20, 1884…From 1884 to 1896, the St. Joseph hospital cared for 138 patients and 18 orphans, who, in 1887, were accommodated in a larger facility. In 1896 the hospital was closed and converted into St. Joseph Academy. Later it became the center of the present Motherhouse of the Adrian Dominican Sisters.

Text from Historical Marker for the Centennial
Printed for the congregation’s 100th Jubilee
Pasted into Amid the Alien Corn by Sr. Nadine Foley

---

176 Priniski interview, July 15, 2016.
5.1 Changing Together Through Reflection, Dialogue and Collaboration

Dominican sisters, who would become Adrians, worked together in the nineteenth century to overcoming the risks of journeying to the American frontier from their safe convent in Bavaria. Then, toward the end of the nineteenth century, heeding the call from the US bishops to face down discrimination against their children by founding schools in every American parish, the Dominican sisters founded two schools in Michigan. By the mid-twentieth century, determined to learn and understand the charge of Vatican II, the Adrian Dominican Congregation went through years of discernment, lost one in four of their members, and then moved forward changing every aspect of their lives. Now, like most congregations in the US, they are once again facing a seismic transition. The average age of their sisters is 80. Today, the congregation has just over 600 sisters of the 1800 who remained after Vatican II. Based on current experience, there is every reason to believe that an average of 50 sisters a year will be dying over the next decade, bringing their numbers to under 300 in less than ten years.

In addition, they are juggling financial challenges because American congregations of sisters are self-sustaining, receiving no financial support from the hierarchy of the church, and fewer than half of the remaining sisters are able to work to earn the money that sustains the congregation.\textsuperscript{177} The sisters have planned for this eventuality for several decades by being fiscally responsible and investing wisely. Still, as their numbers diminish and few women are joining, the younger women who are entering will have serious fiscal challenges ahead. They are aware of this and are doing what the sisters always do – reflecting honestly on their situation, developing options and working together to decide how they move forward in their new reality.\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{177} Mary Priniski, Mary Ann Ennis, Mary Rae Waller interviews, 2016 and 2017.
\textsuperscript{178} Marilin Llanes interview, June 29, 2017.
Given this reality, there might be reason for the sisters to question the continuation of the values that have guided their lives. When asked whether this is a concern for the sisters, Schulte expressed optimism, not just because of the younger sisters who are coming in, but also because of the education and health care organizations they have created by their sponsorship over the last hundred years. Every other year the congregation holds an institute that brings together the lay and religious staff of those organizations. This year, Schulte attended. “It’s true we are dying out. There’s no doubt about that,” said Schulte, “but meeting with the people who work with our sponsored organizations, I know our values will survive.” It is obvious that Schulte is heartened when she talks about these conversations, heartened and hopeful.\(^\text{179}\)

Still, the deaths day after day in these numbers of women who have been one’s family, remain difficult and exhausting. Two sisters, Mary Rae Waller and Mary Ann Ennis, are the chaplains who minister to the sisters who have retired to the motherhouse as they move through what Ennis and Waller call their next transition. Three years ago, the congregational leadership asked Waller to leave her hospital chaplaincy and come to the motherhouse to head up this ministry. Waller says they are living the “new normal,” the way she refers to the hours she and her team spend in the emergency room of the local hospital and in meeting with sisters’ families as they together plan the continuing stream of funerals. Waller brings to this ministry not only her Catholic religious beliefs, but also the traditions of her Native American heritage. Both give her a strong sense of the continuum of life. For her, the spirit of each person lives on in the earth and its human family. Those beliefs stiffen her resolve and give her the patience and the energy she brings to her work.\(^\text{180}\)

\(^{179}\) Schulte interview, June 29, 2017.

\(^{180}\) Mary Rae Waller, O.P., Ph.D., interview by author, Adrian, MI, October 1, 2016.
Waller’s partner in this ministry is Mary Ann Ennis. At 83, Ennis brings diverse experience to this chaplaincy. Nineteen-year-old Ennis entered the congregation in 1953, after a year working in a men’s clothing store. “I was living with my brother and sister-in-law,” she explains. “We needed the money and that was the job I could get.” Not certain about her desire to become a sister or in which congregation she might wish to belong, Ennis consulted her parish priest, a Dominican who suggested she consider the Adrians. She did, and within one day of entering, she was sent to a local parish to teach. Ennis taught primary school children in local Catholic schools for another 12 years.

Then Vatican II and the Adrian Dominican Chapter of Renewal happened. Ennis was a delegate to the Chapter meetings. She remembers spending hours every day studying, writing out questions, seeking answers. At the end of that three-year period, Ennis felt called to join a group of Dominican men and women who were preaching in West Virginia. She says, “I was so shy. I never thought I would do anything like preach, but,” she continues, “I felt called to do this. It was the best seven years.” As Ennis explains their work, they would go into communities, get to know people and meet with family members and neighbors in the home of a host. They would select something from the Gospels and ask a question about it for the group to think about and discuss. Ennis indicates that these meetings could go on for hours, with people talking about their fears, hopes, and problems. When asked what she did next, Ennis casually says, “Then I went to Kenya.” There she helped young novices in another congregation to get ready to take their vows. When she left Kenya, she trained as a chaplain and went to work in a hospice. Her life experience made her ready for her current ministry, which is also her retirement. She laughs and says, “We don’t ever really retire.”

---

181 Ennis interview.
The heritage of the older Adrian Dominicans is European. Starting with their Bavarian founders, through the Irish immigration, the Adrian Dominican sisters were mostly white, mostly Midwestern. Now, of those few women who are entering, all but one are women of color, and only one was born in the United States. Not surprisingly, once again, changes in the congregation align with changes in the country, this time mirroring the changing demographics of the US.

Interestingly, these new sisters are entering the congregation at older ages then their foremothers, coming in with much greater life experience than the previous generations. Prime examples are two sisters living and working in the Chicago area. Xiomara Méndez-Hernández was a successful business woman in the Dominican Republic. A well-known clothing designer, Méndez-Hernández was seeking more than prominence and money. When she met the Adrian Dominicans, she began thinking and learning more about her Catholic heritage and eventually decided to sell her business and entered the congregation. She is content that she has found the life she was seeking when she decided to become a Dominican. Méndez-Hernández gives out continual vibrations of the delight she takes in life. She is working as a chaplain for Loyola Hospital in Chicago, preparing to make final profession.182

Marilin Llanes was born in Cuba in 1967. She and her family were finally permitted to come to the US after many harrowing years at odds with the Castro regime. Llanes and her family were able to leave Cuba when Llanes was five-years-old. They joined family in Miami, where Llanes grew up. Like many of the sisters, Llanes always knew she wanted to do something different, to do good in the world. Llanes spent decades making the decision to come to where she is now in her life, entering the congregation once before, leaving and returning after

---

two decades. She is a psychologist working as the only bilingual counselor for the Joliet, Illinois school system.183

Given their history of productive adaptation to change, it comes as no surprise that some sisters in the congregation see this change in demographics as an opportunity to model a diverse society dedicated to the shared common good. One such sister is Mary Priniski. Noting the diversity of the new sisters joining the community, Priniski reflects:

We are not going to be a white community. The future is going to be a mixed community. So, how do we foster intercultural living. We can be a witness to the world that is so violent and so judgmental against people who are not “like I am.” So, how do we be a witness to the fact that people who come from very different cultural and different racial backgrounds can live together positively?

Priniski is suggesting that the community consider providing resources to at least a group of these new recruits into the Adrian Dominican Congregation, making it possible for them to attempt to model a productive, multicultural living arrangement184

While not true of everyone in the community, Priniski’s attitude does reflect that of a majority of the congregation. Most welcome these new sisters among them with warmth and excitement. The older sisters see in these young women a future for their religious community, a future they will not know, which they are counting on these new sisters to imagine and create, just as they recreated religious life in the last great transition in the 1960s and 1970s. They have no idea what that future will be, where and around what it will be centered and what its core social values will be. What they know is it will never be what it was. Priniski sums up, “What is going on in the greater society indicates it will never be big again in the same way [living large with little consideration for natural and human resources]. We too are going to have to learn

183 Llanes interview, June 29, 2017.
184 Priniski interview, August 10, 2016.
how to live small. Projections tell us we will never have the 2400 we had at one point. We need to learn what our role is when we live as a smaller group.”

The sisters are not flinching as they face their reality as individuals and as a group. They are identifying what they can control, recognizing we are all living with a constantly changing universe of variables over which we have, at best, limited control. Perhaps because they proudly trace their history back to the founding of the Order of Dominic in 1233, they tend to take a longer view when addressing problems. Perhaps because they are grounded in their values and in a belief in something bigger than themselves, they tend not to seem harried as they address the uncertainties in this transformation. Perhaps we can learn from their process, which includes facing their truths and making those truths work for them.

5.2 Accepting Reality and Adapting to Systemic Change in our World

The place to begin understanding social change lies in our critical ability to make sense of the world around us. When thinking about social change, our own experiences and everyday knowledge guide our thinking. Unfortunately, this is not enough. It is necessary to go beyond the ways we usually think about things. 

Garth Massey
Ways of Social Change

There are scholars who believe our secular world society is also in transition. Sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein has posited that our current world system is imploding. He traces the current system back to the sixteenth century. Wallerstein says the current political system of nation-states was built to accommodate a capitalist economic system, the goal of which is the constant accumulation of capital. In World-Systems Analysis, Wallerstein indicates this system, like all world systems of the past, will end and be replaced by another. In 2005, when his book was published, he suggested we were in a 25 to 50-year time of transition. Wallerstein’s

---

185 Priniski interview, November 23, 2016.
hypothesis of implosion is based on his analysis of three increases in the cost of production that will lower the margin of profit sufficiently to impede the “endless” accumulation of capital.\textsuperscript{186}

Wallerstein lists the three elements of the cost of production he says are increasing beyond the level of systemic tolerance: 1) physical resources needed to produce product; 2) labor needed to create product; and 3) taxation needed to pay for infrastructure to move product to market. Whether or not one agrees with his theory, it is sobering to analyze the current status of these “costs of production,” and realize there are indications they are indeed in peril, which will cause the continuous increase in the costs of production.\textsuperscript{187}

The majority of the world’s scientists believe we are warming our earth to the point where it could become uninhabitable: heating the land to the extent that it becomes fallow, melting the glaciers and the permafrost areas that will cause seas to rise, changing coastlines and swallowing islands, and increasing a cycle of heating of our atmosphere, eventually making the earth too hot for our species.\textsuperscript{188} Further, for decades, transnational corporations have constantly moved their extraction or production operations to areas where labor was cheaper; first to their colonies overseas and poorer regions internally, then to poorer countries of the global South. In fact, US companies first moved their operations to the US South in the middle decades of the twentieth century, then to Mexico, then China, then Vietnam, now South Asia. It remains to be seen what, if any, available cheap labor areas are left for these companies to exploit.\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., Chapters 4 and 5.
As to taxation, after decades of reducing taxes, in the US, there is a political consensus forming that the US must address its crumbling infrastructure and its troubled education and health systems that fall below those of Europe and Asia on many metrics. For over six years, Kansas has provided the clinical experiment on trickle-down economics. The state lowered corporate and high-end income taxation, on the theory that it would bolster growth, which did not occur. By 2017, their disintegrating public sector became so problematic that the state legislature overturned a governor’s veto and raised taxes. At this time, it is unknown whether that failed Kansas experiment will have an impact on other jurisdictions, but it could be an indication that we are headed for a time of increased taxation at local, state and federal levels.

While our world capitalist system may not implode, there is no question that, with the pace of technological advances in commerce and industry, the nature of work as we understand it will likely change dramatically over the coming decades. We may well have to learn new ways of using our natural resources and sharing our wealth if we are to survive as a species.

The sisters may have lessons for us as we face these dramatic changes. Would our world society be better able to address what seems to be difficult times ahead if we take a clear-eyed, longer, deeper look into where we are, how we got here, and where we want to go? Has the experience of the sisters in dealing with change shown us that the best way to face massive transition is to start by respecting each other’s humanity and working in concert toward a decent life for all?

There are some hopeful signs that we are addressing some universal problems as a world society, engaging in multi-year processes that many may find tedious, but the sisters would

recognize as necessary to come to a strong, enduring common understanding. The Paris Agreement on climate change is one such hopeful engagement. It emerged from a shared belief that an environmental catastrophe was threatening our world that could only be avoided by rigorous joint action. Recognizing that the impact of trade winds and ocean currents do not stop at human-conceived, abstract national borders, over 190 nations reached an agreement to work together to save our planet. Despite the recent US pull-out of the agreement, it is a welcome example of the world community coming together to work toward the shared common good.

The way in which the sisters are able to welcome an unknown future is well summed up by a sister now in her 90s, who in the late 1960s was in the leadership of the congregation when the sisters wrestled with Vatican II changes. “Religious life will be different,” she says. “But it will be better.”191 The Adrian Dominicans find strength in their faith and courage in their past successful struggles with change, which despite the attendant turmoil, did not toll an end to religious life. They live with hope for a future ensured for women religious by the values, beliefs and buoyant energy of women like Sr. Xiomara Méndez-Hernández:

I was not at all interested in religious life until I met Dominican Sisters of Adrian… In the Adrian Dominicans, I saw Sisters who were full of love and joy, women who worked for justice and peace – and who danced! When I started praying with them, I began to feel a call.192

---

191 Interview with an Adrian Dominican sister, July 17, 2016.
192 Xiomara Méndez-Hernández, “Caught by the Spirit Today,” Rising Spirit: Impact of Vatican II on Adrian Dominican Sisters, an internal document of the Adrian Dominican Congregation published on the 50th anniversary of Vatican II. Xiomara Méndez-Hernández entered in 2008 from her Dominican Republic home, where she had her own business in and taught fashion design.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Interviews

- Mary Ann Ennis, O.P., M.A.
- Catherine Feister
- John Feister
- James Hug, S.J.
- Marilin Llanes, O.P., M.S.
- Aneesah McNamee, O.P., M.A.
- Xiomara Méndez-Hernández, O.P., M.S.
- John Newbauer
- Mary Newbauer
- Mary Priniski, O.P., Ph.D.
- Maria Riley, O.P., Ph.D.
- Les Schmidt, Glenmary Brother
- Peter Anthony Schulte, O.P., M.Ed.
- Mary Rae Waller, O.P., M.A.

Archives

The American Catholic Research Center and University Archives (ACUA 326), Catholic Committee of the South Collection.

Center of Concern Records (COC), University of Notre Dame Archives (UNDA), Notre Dame, IN 46556, Maria Riley Boxes.

Other Primary Sources

Adrian Dominican Constitution and Statues. Adrian: printed by the Adrian Dominican Sisters, 2006.


“Caught by the Spirit Today.” Rising Spirit: Impact of Vatican II on Adrian Dominican Sisters. An internal document of the Adrian Dominican Congregation, published on the 50th anniversary of Vatican II.

Enactments of the General Chapter of 2016 of the Adrian Dominican Congregation. “…a great hope in common.” Adrian: Published by the Adrian Dominican Sisters, 2016.


Pope Francis. Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home, Encyclical Letter, Includes


Priniski, Mary Margaret, O.P. “A Process of Conversion to the Perspective of the Poor.” PhD diss. The Union Institute, 1992.


“SEJ Represents Church in Good and Bad Times.” *The Catholic Banner*, June 18, 1981.


**Secondary Sources**

**Books**


Foley, Nadine, OP. *Seeds Scattered and Grown: Adrian Dominican Sisters History 1924-1933* Adrian: Published by the Congregation, 2006.

Foley, Nadine, OP, and Arlene Bachanov. *To Fields Near and Far: Adrian Dominican Sisters History 1933-1961* Adrian: Published by the Congregation, 2015.


**Journal and Newspaper Articles**


Blackburn, Marion. “Return to the Trail of Tears.” *Archaeology* 65 no. 2 (March/April 2012): 53-55.


Lefevere, Patricia. “Sister Embraced Activism Later in Life.” *National Catholic Reporter* (February 12-25, 2016): 5a-6a


