



Carmelite News

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The Rich History of Baltimore Carmel

Baltimore Carmel, the first community of religious women to be established within the thirteen original states, was founded in 1790 in Port Tobacco, Charles County, southern Maryland. Following the Revolutionary War, women from some of the oldest Anglo-Catholic families in colonial Maryland (Brents, Matthews, Neales) returned home from English-speaking Carmels in the Low Countries to begin Teresian contemplative life in the newly formed United States. They were accompanied by their Maryland born chaplain, Father Charles Neale, the first Jesuit to pronounce his vows following the re-establishment of the Society of Jesus in Maryland in 1805. Mother Bernardina Matthews and her two nieces were cousin and nieces not only of Charles but also of Leonard Neale, second archbishop of Baltimore, and Francis Neale, SJ, an important player in the foundation of Georgetown University. Father Ignatius Matthews, pastor of congregations in Newtown and Deer Creek, Maryland from 1766 until his death was Mother Bernardina's brother. The nuns crossed the ocean to America the same time John Carroll was sailing to England to be ordained first bishop of Baltimore.

The nuns were intimately connected with the beginnings of the Church in Baltimore. They possess numerous letters from John Carroll showing not only his close friendship with the community and his interest in their growth through "the addition of new members," but also his reliance on their contemplative prayer for him and his vast diocese. Their friendship with Carroll was secure enough to bear even serious disagreement over the interpretation of the Carmelite charism in the new nation. Correspondence with each succeeding archbishop reveals a continuous relationship with the growing Church.

When the Sulpicians arrived in Baltimore to begin the first seminary in the United States Father Francis Nagot immediately wrote to the nuns in Port Tobacco to request their prayer for the new seminarians. Mother Elizabeth Seton was a close friend of the community; she had taught two of the younger Carmelites along with her own daughters in Emmitsburg. From the beginning until the present, numerous documents in the archives show the

enormous trust of the people in the prayer, the life, and the friendship of the community: bishops, founders, missionaries, leaders and members of religious congregations, civic leaders, thousands of lay people, Roman Catholics and those of other faith traditions. While the nuns have seemed to live on the margins of the archdiocese, they have, in fact, dwelt at its heart and carried its history. The community has a very long and often intimate memory of life and ministry, of joy and sorrow, of growth and diminishment, in our archdiocese.

For forty-one years the Carmelites lived a contemplative life on their farm in Southern Maryland until they were forced by the depressed economy to move to Aisquith Street in East Baltimore. There for the next twenty years (1831-1851), in order to survive financially, they conducted one of the first schools for "young ladies" in the country. At a time of considerable anti-Catholicism, the Carmelite Academy welcomed pupils from "other religious denominations."

In 1873 the community relocated to a newly built monastery at Caroline and Biddle streets where they resided for almost a hundred years at a site familiar to many Baltimore Catholics. It was not far from old St. Joseph's Hospital, The Little Sisters of the Poor, St. Francis Academy and the parishes of Saint Michael and Saint James. From its fourth floor the nuns watched the "Great Baltimore Fire" (1904) and hung scapulars out the garret windows as they prayed for the deliverance of the city! In 1961 the city bought the Biddle Street property in order to build a public school and the Carmelites moved to their present location on Dulaney Valley Road.

Since the Second Vatican Council with its summons to renewal and adaptation, the community has sought to develop a contemporary expression of contemplative, Carmelite life. In response to the enormous desire and need of our people for encouragement in their spiritual lives and for guidance in their prayer and movement toward communion with God, the sisters now share their life of prayer in a variety of ways: in liturgical celebrations of the Eucharist and the Divine Office, in different kinds of

prayer experience, spiritual direction, spiritual friendship/companionship, in teaching prayer to young adults, etc. The community provides opportunities for retreat at the monastery by offering a sacred space, an oasis of peace and solitude, where interiority and communion with God are valued and supported. It also encourages the contemporary interpretation of Carmelite spirituality and its great classical/mystical texts through

study, research, writing, occasional lectures and seminars. The sisters engage in archdiocesan activities whenever they seem to call for a contemplative presence.

As Baltimore Carmel celebrates 225 years of Carmelite life in the archdiocese of Baltimore, the Carmelites remain its one community whose primary mission and focus is contemplative prayer.

Centenary Corner

On April 4 we were honored to host a full chapel for the first lecture in our Centenary Celebration by Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury. He gave a spectacular presentation entitled *Marginality and Mindfulness: Teresa and the Experience of Powerlessness*. Our overwhelming thanks go out to all who attended this lecture.

Please plan to join us for the official opening of the Centenary year with a concert by Kim and Reggie Harris on Saturday, October 11th at 7 p.m. and a special Eucharist in honor of St. Teresa on Sunday October 12th at 9 a.m.

Please join us as we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel on July 13 at 9 a.m.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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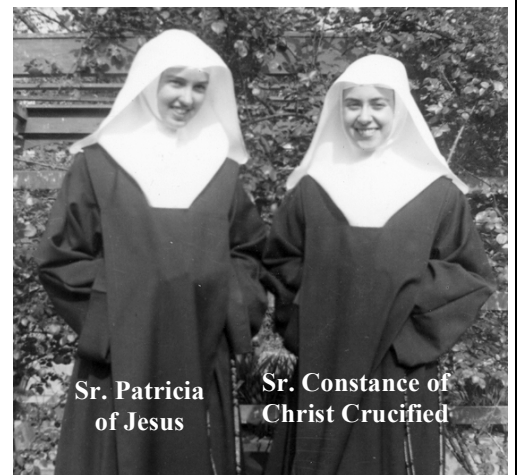


**Sr. Olivia of
the Light of
Christ**

**Sr. Cecilia of
the Cosmic
Christ**

On Sunday, May 25, Sr. Olivia of the Light of Christ and Sr. Cecilia of the Cosmic Christ were joyfully received into the novitiate. Please keep them in prayer as they continue to journey with us.

The picture on the right shows Sr. Patricia of the Jesus and Sr. Constance of Christ Crucified, circa 1952, when they were novices at our Biddle Street Monastery.



**Sr. Patricia
of Jesus**

**Sr. Constance of
Christ Crucified**