

BLESSED MARY THERESA OF JESUS GERHARDINGER



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*A Woman
Led by the Lord*

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Notes:

1. M. L. Ziegler, in: Westenrieder, *Zeitgeschichte in Lebensbildern*, Grünewald 1982, p. 27
2. R. Mittermüller, *Michael Wittmann von Regensburg*, Landshut, 1859, Letter, January 24, 1811, p. 346
3. J. B. Lehner, *Bischof Michael Wittmann, So stirbt der Gerechte*, 1958, p. 9
4. Letter from Bishop Wittmann to Caroline Gerhardinger, January 2, 1822
5. M. L. Ziegler, *M. Theresia Gerhardinger*, Schnell und Steiner, 1953, pp. 8-9
6. M. L. Ziegler, Westenrieder, pp. 28-29
7. Letter 144
8. Letter 246
9. Letter 11
10. M. L. Ziegler, Westenrieder, p. 33
11. Decrees of the Kings of Bavaria, January 17, 1852
12. Letter 1250
13. Letter 714
14. Letter 714
15. Letter 2277
16. M. L. Ziegler, *Mutter Theresia Gerhardinger*, Schnell und Steiner, Munich, 1950, p. 303
17. Francis Sebastian Job, *Geist der Verfassung*, 1839, p. 27
18. Letter 714



St. Louis, Missouri

Blessed Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger A Woman Led by the Lord

Mother Theresa set one goal for herself — to live a life totally given to Christ, totally committed to the service of God and his people.

How would she achieve this? God would show her the way. She began her life-journey in simple trust, and she went on, faithful to the Lord as he led her step by step in ways that seemed quite ordinary, but which would have profound significance. Her providential journey is a simple story, a life summarized in a few short sentences:

- *Caroline Gerhardinger was born June 20, 1797, at Stadtamhof, a suburb of Regensburg, Bavaria. She was the only child of a well-to-do shipmaster, Willibald Gerhardinger, and his wife Maria Francisca.*
- *In 1809 Caroline graduated from the girls school in Stadtamhof, the same year that the nuns of the Congregation de Notre Dame (later known as the Canonesses of St Augustine) were forced by the government to leave the school.*
- *In 1833, supported by Father Francis Sebastian Job, a friend of Bishop Wittmann, who had died, Caroline founded the Congregation at Neunburg vorm Wald, taking the name of Mary Theresa of Jesus.*
- *Ten years later, after having founded several other religious houses, she moved the motherhouse to the former Poor Clare convent in Munich known as the Angerkloster. Her community by that time already numbered 40 sisters, 40 novices, and 60 candidates.*
- *From the center in Munich Mother Theresa worked with all her strength to further the Kingdom of God. At the time of her death on May 9, 1879, she was the superior of a world-wide congregation of 2,300 sisters.*

Beneath these simple phrases is the story of a woman full of love, radiant with inner joy and peace, paradoxically enriched by renunciation, suffering, and the hard work of leadership. Throughout a lifetime of prayer, energetic planning, and exhausting travel,

she remained wonderfully ready, whatever the risks or hardships, to go wherever the Lord would lead her. So filled was she with love for God and for his people, that even today she continues to touch hearts and influence lives.

Caroline Grew up in Difficult Times

Caroline grew up during a time of political, cultural, and economic upheaval in Germany. The Napoleonic Wars caused famine, epidemics, poverty, and inflation. The reigning princes seized all the possessions of the church, suppressed monasteries and convents, taking their property and thus destroying the cultural and educational centers of the Catholic people. Caroline's school in Stadtamhof was among those closed.

Such actions were encouraged by the spirit of the Enlightenment, which rejected religion and the church. Adherents of this philosophy did not attach much importance to Christian education; their aim was to train young citizens intellectually. They sought to do this by compulsory attendance in state schools. The government, however, was short of the funds needed to carry out these plans. As a result an educational crisis developed and with it an inner moral crisis among the people.

An historian of the time writes, "if the corruption of morals spells the ruin of the nation, then we Bavarians at present are among the most pitiable people in Europe."¹

George Michael Wittmann, Cathedral Pastor, Paves the Way

Stadtamhof, separated from Regensburg only by an ancient stone bridge across the Danube, belonged at that time to the cathedral parish of Regensburg. George Michael Wittmann, who later became bishop, was pastor of the cathedral. The needs of the people and the godless spirit of the times troubled him. Seminary professor and theologian that he was, he worked tirelessly for the welfare of his people. With unshakable fidelity

est longing, one at last with her loving God, surrendering to him the eventful, and blessed years of her long life.

Mother Theresa Lives on in her Congregation

Today about 7,500 School Sisters of Notre Dame in 21 provinces in Europe, North and Latin America, in Asia, Oceania, and Africa, carry the legacy of this great and gifted woman into our world. Through many kinds of educational endeavors they help the people of our times to live full Christian lives. They continue to be concerned about the needs of women and the poor. Their common heritage and charism, their community life and mission promote and strengthen the unity which binds them together — across nations and cultures — to Christ, to one another, and to the people to whom they are sent.

They follow the spirit of their foundress Mother Theresa and of Father Job, who in his book *The Spirit of the Constitutions* called for the formation of heart and mind in addition to academic instruction. He wrote, "What the sisters ought to aspire to is not instruction alone, but the forming of God-fearing and upright Christians."¹⁷

Every year School Sisters from all parts of the world visit the tomb of their foundress in St. James Church in Munich. There they pray to enter more deeply into her spirit. Many other people go there hoping for help in their needs through Mother Theresa's intercession.

By her beatification on November 17, 1985, the Church proclaimed to the entire world that Mother Theresa, a woman led by the Lord, can be a model for all on their way to God. In one of her letters Mother Theresa speaks with characteristic directness, summarizing in a way, her own faith-journey, and praying for us as we continue on ours: "May God be our goal and end in all things, our highest good, in whom we find everything that gives us peace and makes us truly happy."¹⁸

hands of God. God guided "his work" to a successful conclusion. In the end Rome supported Mother Theresa. She received the final approbation of the Rule of the Congregation by Pope Pius V in 1865. With it the form of government envisioned by Wittmann and developed by Mother Theresa was recognized.

Joy at Journey's End



Ontario, Canada

Her indefatigable zeal for God's cause finally exhausted Mother Theresa. Worn out as she was, the thought of death was no stranger to her and the infirmities of old age sapped her strength.

To be able to live still more for God, she felt inclined to withdraw from the duties of her office. However, since the Holy Father had appointed her superior general for life, as was the custom at that time, the sisters felt that it was the will of God for her to remain in office.

As she felt her health decline, she faced the possibility of dying with her usual directness and trust. She thought of her sisters once again and wrote them a letter of farewell. She asked for pardon and pleaded for their prayers; she admonished,

thanked, and promised not to forget any of them when she passed into

the other world. During the last hours of her life she prayed again and again, "Jesus, have mercy on me Jesus, I pray for the sisters!"¹⁶

On May 9, 1879, at the age of 82, she who had struggled for unity in her congregation entered into the fulfillment of her deep-



Bishop Wittmann, friend of the Poor

he upheld the teaching authority of the Church and by the witness of his exemplary Christian life, he fearlessly opposed the destructive forces of the Enlightenment.

Admired as an upright, unassuming priest, Wittmann's apostolic zeal was nourished by his deep union with God and his personal austerity. He loved his people; he spent himself for them. He became known as a friend of the poor and the powerless, especially neglected children. For them he prayed and sacrificed. As pastor and as school supervisor he was deeply concerned

about their education and asked himself what he could do to help. He worried about their future, since they showed little respect for traditional values and seemed to care for nothing except having a good time.

Wittmann felt change would come only by educating strong Catholic women. In 1811 he wrote, "We men may pride ourselves on our power over women; nevertheless, they rule us, and their morality shapes our morality. It is women who determine the morality of cities and nations."²

Father Wittmann believed that what was needed for this educational work were women religious. He envisioned them caring especially for the children in villages and small towns.

What could he do to achieve this? With wisdom and prudence he sought for the right direction. The call was clear, but carrying it out was a slow process, indeed. His efforts paved the way for the founding of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Even on his deathbed he showed concern for the progress of the new foundation, saying confidently, "This is no human matter — it is God's work."³

The Seed of Vocation Falls on Fertile Soil

According to the plan conceived by Father Wittmann, teachers for the poor should come from the middle class. They should be accustomed to a simple life style, and be ready to teach in places where funds might not be available for the education and formation of girls. The ones to do this, he believed, would be a new religious community of sisters. Unlike other congregations who lived together in large convents, these would live in small groups to serve in the small towns and countryside. They would be united under a central government having one motherhouse.

Wittmann took the necessary steps toward founding such a congregation, waiting patiently while the seed of a vocation began to germinate in the heart of a young woman there in Stadtamhof. He prepared the soil for healthy growth. Together with his assistant pastor, Father George Maurer, he took over the girls school at Stadtamhof. Here he began a truly Christian educational center in which he could train three former students of the Canonesses of St. Augustine for the teaching profession. One of these was twelve-year-old Caroline Gerhardinger, an only child.

At first Caroline showed no enthusiasm for this new role. She preferred the busy life at home where people were always coming and going. Her great love for her parents and her natural aptitude for homemaking pointed to a different future.

However, after her father and mother consented to the proposal of Father Wittmann, Caroline, too, agreed. Despite her reluctance, she did not feel coerced into this decision, because she had already begun to recognize God's will in the circumstances of her life. She found the strength to

illness, the closing of missions during the Kulturkampf, the contempt for and expulsion of her sisters during troubled times — these were only a few of the sorrow-filled experiences of her life.



Mankato, Minnesota

Without doubt the most painful time she had to endure was the long period of misunderstanding about the government of the congregation. In order to help people in rural areas, she had followed Bishop Wittmann's vision and founded many small mission houses, departing from the customary form of govern-

ment in self-contained, independent monastic houses. At the same time she developed a strong central government uniting these numerous small communities. During the years of expansion into many different countries, it became evident that this approach developed a unified spirit and directed all the sisters toward a common goal. It was also clear that a woman superior was able to understand and inspire the other women who were her own sisters.

Archbishop Karl August von Reisach of Munich had other ideas. Like many churchmen he stressed the authority of each diocesan bishop over religious congregations. He could not support the new approach of Mother Theresa. During the period of this struggle he ordered that no novices were to take vows at the Munich motherhouse. This went on for several years. Mother Theresa was even temporarily deprived of her office. During this painful time she showed her greatness as a deeply religious woman. Convinced of her mission, she adhered to the way she felt was correct, but she placed herself and the future of the congregation entirely in the

me when I asked him something on behalf of his holy cause. Often I had to pour out my troubles to him — troubles I could not tell you, because you could not have borne them." ¹⁴

Mother Theresa chose Mary as the model for her sisters and for the girls whom they served. Therefore, she dedicated her congregation to the Mother of God. She hoped that, like Mary, the sisters would be women whose lives were totally directed toward God and who would carry Christ to the world around them. The name "School Sisters of Notre Dame" would be a constant reminder of this dedication and mission. In all the difficulties of her life, Mother Theresa turned to Mary. She offered to her sisters the words of Our Lady as their motto: "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5)

As a foundress, as a superior, she gave her energy and affection to her sisters. She showed them a mother's concern. She visited them on their missions, took time to listen and to speak with them, noticed their needs, and if they were sick, spared no effort or costs to provide care for them. Yet she could be serious, even stern, when she found that sisters were negligent in the observance of their religious rule of life.

Mother Theresa's apostolic zeal was shown above all in her concern for children, especially for those who were wayward or poor. She especially enjoyed spending her nameday at the orphanage in Freising, because her "darlings" would enjoy a celebration for her feast-day.

In one of her best known sayings, Mother Theresa speaks from her own experience: "All the works of God proceed slowly and in pain, therefore their roots are sturdier and their flowering the lovelier." ¹⁵ Clearly Mother Theresa had entered into the paschal mystery. Her faith-life was shaped by it. Again and again the crises she experienced in the life and growth of her congregation showed her that resurrection is already hidden in the moment of dying, and that the flowering of new life follows upon a season of suffering.

The sudden deaths of Bishop Wittmann and Father Job at the critical moment of the congregation's founding, the bitter poverty experienced by the young community, her own times of serious

speak a courageous, "yes." Like her faith-filled parents, she was already at home in God's will.

During the next three years Caroline learned the art of teaching, and she showed a natural aptitude for that profession. Before too long she passed the state examination for teachers and became director of



Regensburg Cathedral & stone bridge

the Royal Girls School at Stadtamhof as a teacher approved by the King of Bavaria. Under her skillful guidance the school gained a reputation as an outstanding educational institution. The gifted young teacher was also a talented administrator and leader. Her school became a model. As supervisor, Father Wittmann was happy to bring friends, educators, and other well-known persons to Stadtamhof whenever they wanted to see an excellent girls school.

Caroline was also praised for her untiring patience and gentle seriousness. Her personal concern for her students led her to teach them more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Because she wanted them to be prepared for everyday life, she expanded the curriculum to include singing, drawing, spinning, knitting, crocheting, and dressmaking. Caroline created a climate of joy and achievement in her classes. The girls loved to learn.

Word spread. Soon girls from surrounding areas wanted to attend the Stadtamhof school, and parents asked Caroline to take over the education of their children. She found accommodations for some with good families in the neighborhood; others stayed at the school itself, and gradually a boarding school developed.



Munich, Germany

Like Father Wittmann, Caroline was deeply concerned about poor and neglected children. After the death of her father the property of her parents was sold, and she used her inheritance to establish a kind of soup kitchen where warm meals were given to orphan children. Caroline's mother came to live at the school and was happy to keep house for the small group of teachers.

Caroline stayed in touch with the girls after they finished school. Many were in need, and to help them she began a kind of vocational school, hiring a special teacher to instruct them. Because there was a shortage of rooms in the school building, Caro-

line cleared her own room for the new teacher and made a place in the attic for herself.

For twenty-two years Caroline continued her educational efforts at Stadtamhof with the help of her coworkers and the support of Father Wittmann. Their school had been blessed in its mission to educate young women. During all these years Caroline had a single goal: she wanted her students to develop into good mothers, who not only knew how to keep house, but were able to accept the task of the Christian formation of their families. Like Wittmann, Caroline was convinced that this was the only way to change society.

In response to her personal interest in them, her students were attracted by the simple radiance of her life, which reflected her deep, inte-

founded new missions in Silesia, Hungary, Austria, Westphalia, and England.

King Ludwig I abdicated in 1848, but he continued to assist the missions in North America. In 1852 when his successor King Maximilian 11 recommended the introduction of the School Sisters into education as "an excellent way to prevent the threatening impoverishment of the people," " Mother Theresa was flooded with requests she could not fill. Other religious communities also attempted to meet the needs of the people. Relieved to see this unity of action, Mother Theresa wrote, "All in God's vineyard do what they can. It is truly necessary that all work together in this way so that the common goal can best be achieved." ¹²

Journeys, negotiations with civic and church leaders; and endless correspondence filled her days with work and worry. Yet Mother Theresa knew how to avoid being overwhelmed by it all. She was a woman of wisdom and faith who brought work and prayer into harmony. God was her center. Her gaze was fixed on God, whom she recognized as coming to her in each event, knocking at her door in each request. In her more than 5,000 letters she often thanked and praised God for all that has happened to her. In the same spirit she realized that while professional competency was necessary for her sisters in their efforts to educate future mothers, it was not enough. Again and again she urged her sisters to seek the inner center of their lives and abide in the God they found there. She wrote, "May Jesus be for you the way you go, the truth you follow, the life you lead." ¹³

When founding new missions she was always concerned that the convent be located near the church. She wanted her sisters to be able to withdraw from the world. She not only gave direction in words, but also by the example of her own deep spiritual life.

She discovered her Way in the word, in holy scripture, in the Eucharist. Her source of inner strength was in the sacraments and prayer. Each day she prayed for the light of the Holy Spirit, and in the quiet of the night she spent long hours before the tabernacle. In her later years she confided to her sisters, "The Lord never refused

ish schools. With that decision she laid the ground work for participation in an amazing development, because the parochial school system which Father Neumann — now a bishop — promoted with such energy in his diocese became an example for all of North America.



*Mother Theresa
with Mother Caroline
Dallas, Texas*

Shortly after her return to Munich Mother Theresa sent fourteen more sisters to America. In 1850 at the invitation of the German-born Bishop John Martin Henni, she opened a motherhouse in Milwaukee. Located in the mid-western part of the United States, Milwaukee had a large German population who welcomed the missionary sisters. Mother Theresa had met Bishop Henni in 1848 in Baltimore and later that year had visited his see city on her journey with Bishop Neumann.

Mother Theresa named 26-year-old Sister Caroline Friess her vicar for the American missions. Sister Caroline had been one of the first band of five sisters who had come to America in 1847. It was she whom Mother Theresa sent to Milwaukee in 1850 to open the motherhouse there, and under her

leadership the School Sisters continued to open new missions across the United States and Canada.

The Harvest Is Great; God Prepares the Laborers

After her safe return from America, Mother Theresa made preparations for further expansion in Europe, where she soon

rior relationship with God. In everything she wanted "to be a servant of the children according to Christ's teaching."⁴ And since Christ's teaching is love, the mystery of her attractiveness was simply the transparency of love. Love attracts. Love motivates. Love disarms.

Her selfless service of love was rooted in her personal life of penance and prayer. Willingly she let herself be formed by the hand of "the Master." The Lord in turn entrusted her to Father Wittmann, who led her gently in the ways of the Spirit.

During these early years of formation Caroline remained completely herself, quick to delight in God's creation, full of joy, charmed by beauty. A friend remarked that the dressmaker was hard put to design a dress stylish enough for her. Caroline was an independent spirit who loved her freedom, who was keenly aware of her talents and teaching ability, as well as her gifts of leadership and personal charm. Therefore, pride, ambition, and desire for recognition were not unfamiliar to her. She struggled resolutely to overcome her weaknesses. Gradually she came to value fasting and silence and often spent the night hours in prayer. Thus the Spirit gently prepared the way for Christ to enter more deeply into her heart.

A biographer summarizes this period of life in these words: "For two decades Caroline was under Wittmann's guidance, and in the end her character clearly reflected the traits of the master.... Yet all these gifts were hidden beneath an unassuming exterior. Unlike many others, Caroline knew how to be silent and when to step back. Only those who had direct dealings with her over a long period of time appreciated the greatness of this simple, unpretentious woman of whom King Ludwig I of Bavaria once said, 'This woman knows what she wants, and what she wants is well thought out, indeed.' "⁵

The New Foundation Flourishes

The moment to carry out the next phase of Wittmann's plan came when King Ludwig I acceded to the throne of Bavaria in 1825. The new ruler was deeply religious and openly opposed to the Enlightenment. He once said, "Religion is most important. However, it must not re-

main superficial, but must penetrate life. Where it is lacking, things are in a bad state." ⁶

Under the rule of King Ludwig I the suppression of religious orders was reversed. He called the Capuchins and Franciscans back into the country, brought the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul to Munich to care for the sick, and tried to find religious women for the education of girls.

By 1829 Caroline, who had longed for years to become a religious, had received royal permission to open a convent school. However, her idea met with resistance from the citizens of Stadtamhof, since they already had a well-functioning girls school. At this crucial time God sent further help in the person of Father Francis Sebastian Job.



Wilton, Connecticut

Prior to his appointment as chaplain at the Imperial Court in Vienna, Father Job had been a professor at the seminary in Regensburg. Wittmann, then rector of the seminary, was both Job's colleague and confidant. He was well-acquainted with Wittmann's plan, knew Caroline Gerhardinger personally, and, like Wittmann, wanted to use all his savings for a worthwhile cause. He felt he would be able to help neglected girls, especially those of his home town Neunburg vorm Wald, by assisting Caroline to open a convent school there.

Negotiations for the founding of the school were already in progress when Bishop George Michael Wittmann died on March 8, 1833. Shortly before that time he had asked his friend Father Job to support Caroline in her venture by counseling and guiding her. Faithfully carrying out Bishop Wittmann's last request, Father Job not only encouraged her and offered financial assistance, but even drew up a rule of life for the

nich; nevertheless, with some reluctance he permitted the sisters to continue at St. Mary's.

In this seemingly hopeless situation the Redemptorist provincial in America, Father John Nepomucene Neumann — canonized in 1977 — came to the rescue. At his request the archbishop of Baltimore permitted the School Sisters to take over three German schools in Redemptorist parishes. Mother Theresa immediately wrote to Munich and asked for missionaries and funds for the development of these schools. In the spring of 1848 eleven more Bavarian sisters arrived in Baltimore.



Baltimore, Maryland

Now that things were taking shape in Baltimore, Mother Theresa wanted to get an overview of the rest of this vast mission country. Father Neumann invited her to accompany him on his visitation trip through the northern states. In five weeks they traveled 2,500 miles by ox-carts, steamships, and horse-drawn vehicles. On that trip she prepared a field of labor for her sisters who soon would open missions in Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. The School Sisters of Notre Dame were among the first women religious from Germany to begin educational work in America.

Before she returned to Bavaria in July, 1848, Mother Theresa set up an orphanage for abandoned German children. She also directed her sisters to put themselves at the service of Catholic par-

Mother Theresa Sends Sisters to America

Mother Theresa realized that one way in which God reveals his will is through the signs of the times. She tried to respond to these messages with fidelity, even when the journey God seemed to propose was difficult. One of the signs she recognized was the flow of German emigrants to North America. In a forest of western Pennsylvania a Catholic settlement named St. Mary's had been founded by some immigrants who had come from Bavaria. Several Bavarian bishops and an association of settlers requested School Sisters to help these German people. The need was great, since at St. Mary's the people had received no support from their homeland and were living in destitution.

Once again King Ludwig assisted Mother Theresa financially, and with five other sisters she set out for America in 1847. As was so often the case she found herself once again following a way which, like all "God's work" was fraught with suffering and the cross.

Totally exhausted by a stormy voyage, she and her sisters arrived in the New World only to find no support for their plans to go to St. Mary's. They were told bluntly that they ought to return to Germany on the next boat. Mother Theresa, however, was not discouraged. She decided to continue her journey to Pennsylvania. One sister died on the way, but with the other four she traveled by ox-cart through the dense forest until they finally reached St. Mary's. Here they were welcomed gratefully by the German settlers. A school room was immediately built and furnished next to the log house which served as a convent for the sisters. Within a few days they began classes for the crowds of German children who came for instruction.

Mother Theresa herself set out to visit the bishop of Pittsburgh in whose diocese St. Mary's was located.

She received no welcome from him, however, since she had come to the diocese without his permission and could not even show him a letter of recommendation from the archbishop of Mu-

young congregation, called *The Spirit of the Constitutions*. In it he reflects the insights of Bishop Wittmann, as well as his own.

Things began to move swiftly at Neunburg. Caroline by now had clearly recognized her inner call to found a religious congregation. On October 24, 1833, she and two other young women began their religious life in the convent at Neunburg vorm Wald. The townspeople and the sisters eagerly set to work preparing the school. However in February, 1834, before the construction was completed, Father Job also died, and Caroline was left quite alone.

In her desire to make the convent school as attractive as possible to the citizens of Neunburg, Caroline had waived all claim to tuition and to salaries for the teachers. Now she found herself completely without means and with the convent school buildings only half finished. Confronted by this crisis, she showed herself the strong religious woman who refused no sacrifice, no pain, no suffering to follow the path pointed out to her by God.

As soon as she could, she set out for Vienna to find out how the funds reserved for her by Job could be made available. She learned that in order to obtain the money, she would have to have her new congregation approved by both the state and the Church. After obtaining a letter of recommendation from Empress Caroline of Austria, a sister of the Bavarian king, she hurried from Vienna to Munich for further negotiations.

Within a few months she had in hand the approval of the state for the founding of the convent and a confirmation by the Church through the bishop of Regensburg. The congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame had officially come into existence.

The Community's Swift, Surprising Growth

The new convent at Neunburg filled up quickly with novices who eagerly joined Caroline in this new form of religious life.

In 1835 Caroline took her religious vows and chose the name Mary Theresa of Jesus. She continued to rely completely on the guidance and providence of God, and she was not disappointed. Like Bishop

Wittmann, she referred to the congregation as "the work of God," and God indeed cared for his "work" by blessing- it "in full measure, pressed down, and overflowing." (Luke 6:38) There were so many vocations that soon the house at Neunburg could no longer accommodate the community. As a result, by 1836 Mother Theresa had already founded the first "mission house" at Schwarzhofen. Appeals for convent schools continued to come from people in many other towns.

Once again the foundress experienced God's special providence when Archbishop von Reisach of Munich-Freising asked for a mother-house in his diocese. His request came at a most opportune time: Mother Theresa wanted her sisters to have a comprehensive, well-integrated education; but this would require an educational institution large enough to offer opportunities for professional training and practical experience. When the old convent of the Poor Clares in the center of Munich was offered to her, she found it ideal for her purpose. King Ludwig gave her the building and financed the remodeling and furnishing of the new motherhouse according to the plans which Mother Theresa had drawn up in detail and presented to him. The solemn blessing of the Anger convent as the motherhouse of the School Sisters of Notre Dame took place on October 16, 1843. With that ceremony came the official transfer from Neunburg to Munich, and a new center of unity for the young congregation was established, just ten years after the first convent had been opened.

At the new motherhouse all School Sisters would be formed as religious, and all would receive the same preparation for their profession of educating and training youth. From the beginning Mother Theresa was enthusiastic about this plan. She expressed her dream to the archbishop: "Then, satisfied with little, we will go out into the whole world, into the smallest villages and poorest huts... wherever the Lord calls us to bring the good news of the kingdom of God."⁷

These prophetic words soon found their fulfillment. Just ten years after the founding of the motherhouse (and only twenty years after the first foundation in Neunburg vorm Wald) the congregation already had fifty-two houses in Bavaria. The School Sisters had also opened houses in other countries: Wuerttemberg, Westphalia, Silesia, Bohemia, Austria, and North America (1847).



Etched window, Notre Dame of Elm Grove, Wisconsin

Mother Theresa could not fill all the requests for sisters. In 1841 she wrote, "More than forty school districts have recently asked for sisters and we have had to put them off indefinitely."⁸

Mother Theresa always had the same goal when opening mission houses. She wrote, "In operating kindergartens, grade schools, and boarding schools we seek above all to educate girls to become devout mothers. We are especially concerned about girls from the middle and lower classes for whom other educational institutions are inaccessible and who, up to now, have lacked a true Christian education."⁹

Before long the sisters were active in all areas of education and social services. In addition to grade schools, they operated technical and vocational schools and secondary schools. They took care of infants and pre-school children in orphanages and kindergartens and also became involved with the education of youth in rehabilitation centers.

The sisters paid close attention to the pedagogical trends of the times, carefully testing innovative methods and adopting whatever seemed to be useful. One biographer observed, "in the development of teacher education, and in the opening of new types of schools and social welfare institutions, Caroline Gerhardinger was decades ahead of development in the public sector, and to some extent was a leader for them."¹⁰