

UNITED IN MISSION

Atlantic-Midwest Province • Transforming the world through education

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Dear Sisters, Associates and Colleagues,

In this issue of United in Mission, we will read about two School Sisters of Notre Dame who led heroic lives in very difficult situations. Sister



A message from Judith Schaum, SSND

Antonina Kratochwil lived in Poland and Sister Imma Mack lived in Germany during World War II. Their experiences are different but both exemplify Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger's words: "Reason

reckons; love loves." In each story you will see how neither Antonina nor Imma thought about themselves and the dangerous situation they were experiencing, but only about others and the consolation and comfort they could provide.

It is now the season of Lent, 40 days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during which we prepare for the joyful feast of Easter. Let us recall the words of our Holy Father Pope Francis (March 2016): "Christ is risen! And we have the possibility of opening our hearts and receiving his gift of hope. Let us open our hearts to hope and go forth. May the memory of his works and his words be the bright star which directs our steps in the ways of faith towards that Easter that will have no end."

This is my Easter prayer!

Sincerely,

Judith Schaum, SSND

Associate Director of Ministry Services



Sister Antonina Kratochwil (left) and Sister Imma Mack (right) exemplify selfless service.

"Reason reckons; love loves."

Blessed Theresa Gerhardinger

Blessed Antonina Kratochwil

Maria Anna Kratochwil was born Aug. 21, 1881 in Witkowice, Poland. She was the third of seven children born of Jan and Joanna Kratochwil. The family moved to Bielsko and Maria attended the SSND school there. It was recorded that Maria was a gifted student and after she completed her elementary school education, she assisted with the kindergarten children.

Eventually Maria Anna realized she had a religious vocation and confided in the sisters her desire to enter the School Sisters of Notre Dame. She entered the Novitiate in 1909 and received the religious name of Maria Antonina. She made her religious profession September 27, 1910.

For the next 30 years, Sister Antonina taught in several schools throughout the Polish province. She taught and administered schools, boarding schools for girls and served as Director of Formation for young women entering the congregation. Antonina's pedagogical qualifications and her love for the children were greatly appreciated by her colleagues and parents of the children. She also had a beautiful spirit of prayer and was able to perceive the workings of God in her everyday life.

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In 1939 World War II unleashed its horrors on the eastern part of Poland where Sister Antonina taught in a school in Lwów. The Polish people of Roman Catholic denomination were the main subjects of persecution and extermination. After the Bolshevik army occupied the city, the sisters were deprived of their work and their property. They were also forbidden to wear their religious garb. In December 1939, Sister Antonina was sent to the convent in Mikuliczyn which was occupied by the Soviet authorities. Nine sisters were required to live in one room. This situation plus psychological terror caused many sisters to lose their health. Her presence and spiritual strength brought comfort to the sisters. In March 1940 the sisters were expelled from that one room and were rescued by a group of Ukrainian Sisters. They worked on a farm and in a hospital laundry in order to earn money for food. In 1942 the Sisters were arrested by the Gestapo and were transported to the political prison in Stanislawów. There they endured beatings and other humiliations. They suffered hunger, cold and lack of sleep and most became very ill. However, they managed to bring blessings, prayers and a sense of peace to the other women who occupied the same cell. Sister Antonina, in particular, became



Sister Antonina Kratochwil

an angel of solace to the women and even shared with them her meager food allowance.

Sister Antonina was interrogated dozens of times. She was beaten and ill-treated but she never complained. Sometimes her beatings resulted from her acts of kindness to the other women. The guards could not dampen her spirits and her sense of joy in suffering.

In September 1942, the Sisters were released from prison. Sister Antonina was so weak from the harsh conditions and from the disease of typhus, that she was unable to walk to safety. The Sister Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary welcomed the sisters to their convent. Six days after her release, Sister Antonina died, her last words having been: "Our Father who art in heaven." The doctor attending her said: "This is a martyr."

On June 13, 1999, Sister Antonina and 107 other martyrs of World War II were declared

blessed by Pope John Paul II. Antonina has been named patroness of Shalom. With Blessed Antonina we listen to the cries of all creation and we respond in solidarity. Blessed Antonina, pray for us.

Sister Imma Mack

Josepha Mack was born February 10, 1924 in a little village near Eichstätt in Germany. When she was nine years old, Hitler came into power and she began to take an interest in political happenings. Her parents and other adults were being coerced to join the movement and the children were strongly encouraged to join the Hitler Youth Movement. Most of the people in her village, including her family, refused to be a part of this new party.

Life in the village began to be very tense and somewhat dangerous. The boys in her class were forced to join the Hitler Youth Movement and daily they practiced marching and had lessons in Nazism. Josepha noticed a growing hatred among Party members for Jewish people. Synagogues were being burned.

After Josepha completed elementary school, she went to Pfaffenhofen to live with an aunt who was a needlework teacher in the convent school

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of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Josepha desired to learn needlework as well as cooking and shopping. There Josepha found the same political views as those to which she was accustomed in her parents' home. However, the Nazi regime was hostile to convents and early in 1937 religious teachers were banished from all schools. Through all this turmoil, Josepha expressed a desire to become a School Sister. With her family's blessing, Josepha entered the initial formation program in 1940 and, despite the political turmoil expressed her desire to become a novice.

In May 1944, Josepha's life took a sudden and dangerous twist. She was living in St. Clara's Convent in Freising, Germany, not too far from the Dachau concentration camp. At the camp was a vegetable/flower market and a parishioner of St. Clara's needed someone to pick up an order he had made at the market. Josepha was asked to make this



Sister Imma Mack

trip. Although the parishioner accompanied her the first time, Josepha made the weekly trips alone after that. Gradually she befriended prisoners who worked in the market, including a priest named Father Schönwälder. During one of her trips to the market, the priest asked her to bring some hosts and wine so he and other priests could celebrate Mass.

For the next year, Josepha traveled by train and bicycle to the concentration camp, picking up orders of vegetables

and plants and also delivering messages, letters, food and supplies. As you can imagine, this was a very dangerous mission, but one that Josepha willingly undertook to bring comfort to those so unjustly imprisoned.

In August 1945, Josepha was received into the Novitiate and received the name Mary Imma. She made her first profession of vows on August 29, 1946. For the next 40 years, Sister Imma taught children in elementary schools assigned by her provincial leader. During that time she was reluctant to speak about her experiences until 1986. She was asked to speak about the Dachau concentration camp to a group of Catholic students from the University of London. It was then that she began to deal with her painful memories that enabled her to tell the story. Her experiences are recounted in the book *Why I Love Azaleas*. May we imitate her audacity and love.



In the stories of these two School Sisters, we see the beautiful flowering of the SSND charism. We pray that Antonina and Imma will pray for us in our commitment to peace and justice.

Reflection Question:

- To whom can you be an angel of solace?
- How can you bring comfort to those in need?