

Part V - The Difficult and Painful Separation

December 12, 1977: The Contemplative Sisters inform Sister Charmaine Grilliot, President of the active group, and her Council of their desire to separate

For the past twenty-one years we, the Contemplative Sisters, have attempted to live our monastic, contemplative way of life within the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Through the years it has become progressively more difficult for us to live out our way of life from within the framework of policies and norms intended for the entire Congregation. The difficulties we have encountered along the way have brought us to question whether or not we are trying to do an impossible thing; namely, to live one way of life from within another way of life. From our experience we have realized the need on our part for a greater independence in decision-making areas such as government, finances, formation, administration, membership. It has become increasingly clear to us that, if we are to continue to live out our calling to a contemplative way of life in the manner we deem most suitable to its realization, then we must proceed toward greater autonomy.

It is with this in mind that we have drawn up this petition for separation from the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood.

(Editor's note: This letter was signed by the 7 contemplative sisters: Sister Florecita Bidart, Sister Mary Ephrem (Mildred Mary) Neuzil, Sister Mary Louise Voisard, Sister Mary Joseph Therese Fuller, Sister Virginia Manss, Sister Mildred Elaine Becker and Sister Shirley Wishoski.)

January 5, 1978: The Contemplative Sisters confirm their request for a complete break from the active Congregation to Sister Charmaine and her Council

In our continued attempt to deal with you openly and honestly about this matter, we wish to convey to you that we do not see further negotiation for a greater autonomy within the Congregation as being a viable alternative to the total separation we propose. It is our determination that the time in our history has come for a complete break from the Congregation and that, in and through all the circumstances and events which surround our lives, it is the Spirit Who

moves us in this direction.

(This letter was again signed by the 7 Contemplative Sisters.)

February 9, 1978: The request for separation is sent to Pope Paul VI with a request to start a new Religious Institute and to retain their religious vows

We, the Contemplative Sisters of the Precious Blood, submit this petition for separation from the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, and ask to begin a new Diocesan Religious Institute that is Contemplative and has the structure of an autonomous religious house. We also ask of Your Holiness that we be permitted to retain our religious vows.

(This letter was also signed by the 7 Contemplative Sisters.)

March 1, 1978: The Contemplative Sisters wrote Most Rev. Richard Ackerman of the Covington, KY diocese

They informed him that the Community Council of the Sisters of the Precious Blood had notified the local Ordinaries of both the Cincinnati and Toledo dioceses of their request for separation. The Community Council also forwarded the Sisters' request for separation to the Sacred Congregation for Religious in Rome. Bishop Ackerman had previously offered to suggest names of bishops who might be willing to accept a contemplative community in their dioceses if the Sisters would not be allowed to remain in New Riegel or the Toledo diocese.

April 3, 1979: Death of Sr. Mary Florecita Bidart, Foundress of the Cloister



After years of faithfully serving the Sisters of the Precious Blood, Sister Florecita died at age 74. Those who knew her have no doubt that they had lived with a saint! In "*We Lived with a Saint,*" written by Sister Mary Ephrem and Sister Joseph Therese, it states:

In December of 1977, the Officials from Dayton, OH came to New Riegel with orders for Sister Mary Florecita along with Sister Joseph Therese to leave the monastery the next morning. (Later we found out from the Officials in Rome the Superiors in Dayton did not have the authority to do what they did to us.)

Without a hearing, Sister Mary Florecita was judged and condemned.

(The question remains: Canon Law requires justice and charity in all canonical proceedings and due process with appeal on any decisions regarding those under its authority. Those separating from one community to start another are to be cared for until all matters are decided by the Congregation for Religious in Rome, even though they are no longer party to the active workings of the former community. Was proper Canonical due process ever given to these Sisters by the Precious Blood Sisters or by the Toledo diocese to whom they went for help and were turned away? There is nothing to indicate it was, only that it was NOT.)

The Contemplative Sisters requested an extension so they could decide what to do. Sister Mary Ephrem met with the sisters and concluded they must separate if they wished to preserve their contemplative way of life. That resolve was stated in the letter to Sister Charmaine dated December 12, 1977, and finalized in a second letter to her on January 5, 1978, and then made in the request to Pope Paul VI on February 9, 1978 when they asked for complete separation from the active congregation while retaining their religious vows.

Although everything Sister Florecita had worked for was destroyed by the policies of the active group, Sister's faith and trust in the Lord did not waiver and she accepted rejection and unjust treatment in the spirit of her Suffering Lord. According to "*We Lived with a Saint,*" Sister Florecita was even called a failure by the Bishop of the Toledo diocese just two months before her death because he believed the untrue stories he had been told.

(Editor's Note: Jean-Baptiste Chautard wrote in *The Soul of the Apostolate*: "It is a terrible misfortune when there is not to be found one really interior soul among all those at the head of important Catholic projects. Then it seems as though the supernatural had undergone an eclipse, and the power of God were in chains. And the saints teach us that, when this happens, a whole nation may fall into a decline, and Providence will seem to have given men a free hand to do all the harm they desire.")

A week before Sister Florecita's death, the Officials once again came from Dayton and this was the final blow received. Sister suffered a massive heart attack. She was fully conscious to the end, received the Church's Last Rites and died in the arms of her sisters, Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil and Sister Joseph Therese Fuller, at Mercy Hospital, Tiffin, OH at 2:20 a.m. on April 3, 1979.

Although Sister Florecita never, never felt any bitterness, she asked

that her body NOT be returned to Dayton or New Riegel but that she be buried in St. Mary's cemetery in Tiffin, Ohio. Sister Florecita told us as she told many that her link with the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood was severed and her work must continue outside the Congregation and away from New Riegel.

Fr. Basil Heiser at the Sacred Congregation for Religious in Rome had assured the contemplative sisters that their papers were processed and had been sent out. **(Editor's Note: It is not clear today who got those papers and why they were never forwarded to the Contemplative Sisters.)** With all the trials, two sisters returned to lay life and two to the active group. Sister Florecita referred to herself, Sister Mary Ephrem and Sister Joseph Therese, the three faithful to their way of life in spite of the trials, as "the little Trinity."

In the years just prior to Sister Florecita's death, numerous priests and sisters who had studied the contemplative lifestyle of the Sisters at Our Lady of Nativity Cloister had advised them to separate from the active group. Even Archbishop McNicholas, who helped get the cloister started, warned the contemplative group, "Because your Congregation has always been too geared toward activity, I doubt if the Sisters of the Precious Blood will ever understand and appreciate a Contemplative Group." He even warned them to expect problems down the road. Now separation was forced upon them. Sr. Mary Ephrem finished a new Rule of Life for the Contemplatives of the Indwelling Most Holy Trinity begun by Sister Mary Florecita. It had been submitted to Rome for approval, along with the request to separate from the active community of the Sisters of the Precious Blood while retaining their religious vows.

December 31, 1979: The Sisters of the Precious Blood sell the Our Lady of Nativity Convent and property

Just months after Sister Florecita's death, the convent building on a 2 acre property was sold to local businessman, Herman Clouse, for \$150,000. The Seneca County Courthouse shows this land contract being signed on January 16, 1980 and only finalized in 1994. When Mother Aquinas originally gave Sister Florecita part of the convent for the cloister, it was on the condition that she find the donations herself to renovate the dilapidated building and be totally self-supporting. Receipts show that Sister Florecita had put \$800,000 worth of renovations into the convent and even added a whole new wing of bedrooms. After years of service to the active community and after all the money they themselves had raised for the convent, being financially independent of the active group, nothing was

given to these contemplative sisters when it was sold. Instead, they were put out to fend for themselves, not at all like the just division of property and charitable treatment afforded the Precious Blood Sisters by the Precious Blood Fathers in 1878 when the Church decreed male congregations holding common property with female congregations should separate. The history of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, *Not With Silver or Gold*, describes the fair way the Fathers handled that separation with the Sisters.

To insure a just division of all the property owned by the Congregation of the Precious Blood, a conference was held at Carthagena with the purpose of electing a committee to represent the priests and Brothers. Fathers Henry Drees, Godfrey Schlachter, Francis Nigsch, and Bernard Dickman were chosen to serve on this committee. Archbishop Elder also named a committee of priests – all Precious Blood Fathers, as expressly requested by the Sisters—to represent the claims of the Sisters’ community. Those appointed were Fathers Andrew Kunkler, Bernard Austermann, and Thomas Eisenring.

On May 5, 1887, the two committees met to deed over to the Sisters by legal act such tracts of land as had been agreed upon previously. All the buildings on said tracts were included in the transfer, and any debts that still rested on the property were to be paid by the Fathers. To empower the Sisters to possess and administer in their own right the property deeded over to them, their community was legally incorporated as an independent organization under the title of “Female Society of the Precious Blood.” The act of incorporation took place the next day (May 6) and the articles were signed by the following Sisters acting as incorporators: Mother Kunigunda Wehrle, Sisters Ludovica Scharf, Appia Kleinuebing, Nathalia Josberger, and Cecelia Lang. The records and articles of incorporation were then registered in Columbus, Ohio, by Daniel J. Ryan, Secretary of State, on May 11, 1887, and were also filed in the counties where the community owned property.

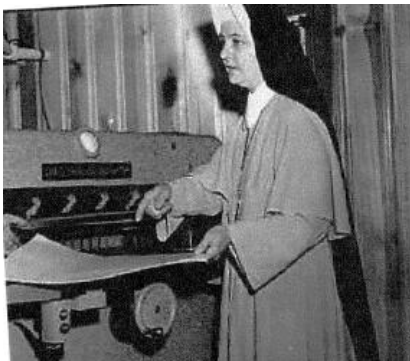
Legal formalities over, the Sisters were free to turn their minds to other matters that called for immediate attention. That all had been carried out equitably and to the complete satisfaction of both parties is shown by a statement of Archbishop Elder in a letter sent to the Sisters’ community the following month: “The result {of the division} has proved the holy spirit of justice and charity which animates both communities. For without much difficulty they agreed unanimously on a division which has proved entirely satisfactory to both.” The one man who was largely

responsible for the admirable way in which all business transactions were carried out between the two communities in the act of separation, was Father Henry. He saw with penetrating vision; he acted with disinterested zeal, bent only on doing the will of God; he loved with the glowing ardor of a saint, and therefore could cement the bonds of love and good will which insured contentment, harmony, and peace where dissatisfaction, discord, and contention might have been expected according to human calculations....

Father Henry himself had made a promise to the Sisters at the time of separation: "We will do our utmost to care for you." He always lived up to that promise. After Father Francis Nigsch, known for his "genial humor and wise experience," had served for nine years (1890-1899) in the capacity of official director of the Sisters, Father Henry was to come back to them as spiritual father and remain with them until death.

(Taken from NOT WITH SILVER OR GOLD, History of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, 1834-1944, pgs. 233-234.)

Property Given Specifically to the Cloister by a Priest



Sister Mildred (Mary Ephrem)
Neuzil at the printing press

Additionally, a 15 acre property along the Sandusky River in Tiffin, OH, 1020 West County Road 6, was given exclusively to the Contemplative Sisters by Father Charles Edward Coughlin from Michigan, so they could build a new monastery or retreat for themselves in the future. When the active group heard of this deed, they asked to see it, kept it, and then sold it

rapidly in a closed market deal. The current owners are Kenneth and Marie Schroth. Attorneys Marley and Marley from Fostoria, OH convinced this property, given by the priest precisely and only to the cloister, which was a separate papal enclosure and should have the right of separate ownership, had begun proceedings to protect it for the Contemplative Sisters by incorporating them but it was sold before this could be done.

As for the Our Lady of Nativity Convent in New Riegel, Mr. Clouse renamed it the Holy Family Center and Fr. Edmund Morman, a retired SVD priest, remained on to conduct retreats and workshops in the area. He would direct Sister Mildred after the death of Archbishop Leibold. The cloistered sisters, without support from the active community until their new Rule was

officially approved, and with everything they had worked for taken from them, were given a place to live in Fostoria, OH by a benefactor related to Archbishop Leibold. Since their printing press by which they had previously supported themselves had been confiscated, the Sisters began to support themselves by raising Champion Labrador Retrievers and German Shepherds to be used in forestry, police and drug work. They continued their quiet, hidden existence in imitation of the Holy Family, while performing works of charity and mercy in the area and promoting the Diary of Sr. Mildred Mary Neuzil, which had not yet received the final official approval of the Church from the Toledo diocese.

To date, as far as we know, there is no final written approval from the Toledo diocese, the only diocese of authority, stating that “this message is worthy of belief by the faithful.” Although the letter issued to the US Bishops and to the public by Archbishop Burke was *mistakenly assumed* by the public, who is not aware of proper canonical procedure, *to be an approval letter*, it was only an opinion letter as Archbishop Burke clearly states in the letter. Archbishop Burke, although a highly respected canon lawyer, is not the proper canonical authority on this issue. While Archbishop Paul Leibold, Sister Mildred’s spiritual director, is responsible for the compilation of The Diary and for the imprimatur on the prayer leaflet and on the medal, and had plaques and statues made, constituting second level approval, he never did these things on his own authority but in conjunction with the Toledo diocese, the diocese of authority. Although a private letter to Sister Mildred indicates, if it were up to him, which it wasn’t, he would have officially approved the messages; hence, there is no formal document from Archbishop Leibold approving the messages, because he would not overstep his authority. He did appear to Sister Mildred on her deathbed, as noted elsewhere, stating that he would finish from heaven what he started on earth.

(See the letter following, written in August of 1981 by Sister Mary Ephrem to Sister Zita of the Marist Sisters in Massachusetts, regarding this forced separation and the trials the remaining sisters endured.)

**Failure to Accept the Message and
Mandate from Heaven -
and the Death of Father Edmund Mormon,
Sister Mildred’s Second Spiritual Director**

August 14, 1980: Nonacceptance of the Message

Our Lady tells Sister, **“Beloved daughter, you are not being accepted because you are a small one. But in the end all will come as I desire. Those who oppose you will receive light to understand.”**

November 22, 1980: Leadership of the United States

It is the United States that is to lead the world to peace....If, however, the United States is faithful to this mandate from heaven and yet fails in the pursuit of peace because the rest of the world will not accept or cooperate then the United States will not be burdened with the punishment about to fall.

February 11, 1981: The shortness of time and a terrible purification about to fall upon all nations

Sister Mary Ephrem speaks of the shortness of time allotted to us to pray and make the necessary sacrifices to bring about world peace. There is an urgency about Our Lady’s warnings of a ***terrible purification that is about to fall upon all nations***. She advises us to pray the family rosary with as many family members present as possible, and to pray the prayer to the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the United States, once or more a day because the Forces of Evil are enveloping the world. Our Lady warns their hatred is now particularly focused on the United States because of the Divine Mandate given it to lead the world to peace.

April and July, 1981: Special warnings from Our Lady and Our Lord on the insidiousness of evil

Dear child, evil is so insidious that it often passes for good. The simple and pure of heart alone can detect the difference. Many good works and many a good person or persons are thwarted and destroyed by apparently good people who are manipulated by the powers of evil because they do not possess that finer sense of being able to detect a false spirit from a true one.



Many *unnatural* acts are being committed in the name of love. This evil is being disguised and tolerated as an intrinsic right like any other. Even some of My priests and consecrated virgins are being caught up into this web of evil, not realizing its terrible consequences.

My dearest one, many false doctrines are being

taught and for many the true Christ is never made knownSeek Me for I only am truth, I only am the Christ.

August, 1981: Sister Mary Ephrem writes Sister Mary Zita regarding the loss of the monastery

Yes, Sister, we were forced out of our monastery through jealousy and lack of understanding. The Superiors did not seem to appreciate or try to understand our vocation. According to them, ours was a wasted life. I'm just afraid, dear Sister, that prayer, real prayer, has taken a back seat in the lives of quite a few priests and nuns. Everything else seems to be considered of greater importance. That is where the powers of evil are wreaking their havoc. They are influencing even many good people by appearing as angels of light. This is where the great danger is. Two of our group left the Order. The other two went back into the active life of the Order and the three of us, including our dear Foundress, asked for an extended leave so as to be able to continue our contemplative life. In the meantime, our dear Foundress passed away, a heart attack brought on by shock and grief. She was a saint. The two of us remained with her until she passed away.

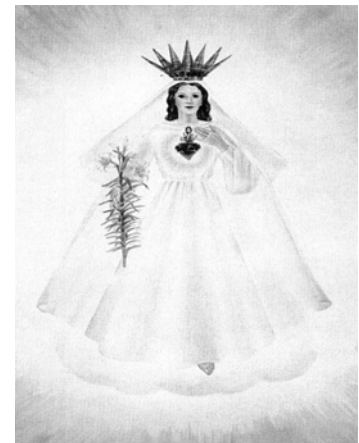
We are striving to continue our contemplative way of life amid pain and hardship. I was told years back that I would have much to suffer, and I was asked if I would be willing and would accept all this suffering to give Him, our Lord, for souls. My answer was "Yes" as proof of my love for Him. Dear Sister, never did I realize what would be asked of me or what I would have to face, but I do not regret any of it, as I love Him so much.

August 22, 1981: Angel Sultra and Archangel Sardus appear

The Angel Sultra, Power of God, is the guardian and protector of the US. The Archangel Sardus, Strength of God, is the guardian and protector of America.

1981: Later messages after Archbishop Leibold's death are prepared for publication at the direction of Fr. Edmund Morman, Sister's new spiritual director

This is the first that the messages are put in booklet form to be published by an outside printer, with the later messages added as an addendum. This creation shows on the Library of Congress records in 1984, again as copyrighted in 1989, and repeated in copyright in 1993 with this new image created by Donna Mae Halsted of CA, drawn exactly to Sr. Mildred's specifications and approved by her, and posted with copyright notice to prevent infringement. Copyright



Our Lady of America

New image by Donna Mae Halsted, copyrighted 1993

notice was not required for anything published after 1978, except to protect against infringement. There have been infringements on the Diary since 2005 and these are currently in court proceedings. Individuals attempting to profit commercially have claimed to the public that this Diary is not protected and is in public domain; that claim is refuted by the evidence. This 1984 creation is the *first official and legal publication* of the Diary, as well as being the *complete Diary* of Our Lady of America's messages, and is only available through Sister Joseph Therese of the Our Lady of America Center in Fostoria, OH.

Fr. Morman had worked closely with Pauline Cavanaugh in Southern California in having this Diary fully copyrighted with the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. Prior to the new copyright law of 1978, the handwritten and typed copies of the Diary, kept hidden from the public at the behest of Archbishop Leibold, were protected by State Common Law as unpublished manuscripts and were automatically then covered by copyright with the new 1978 law which did not require registration or copyright notice to be protected. Such material only needed a copyright notice to prevent infringement. There was a period of time given for authors to register their works with the Library of Congress for their own protection and to post copyright. This was adequately done as shown by Library of Congress records.

February 17, 1986: Death of Fr. Edmund Morman, SVD

Father died in an automobile accident on Presidents Day, February 17. He had a great love for our presidents and it is said that he carried pictures of his favorite presidents in his wallet. The Holy Family Renewal Center where the Our Lady of Nativity Convent used to be is renamed the Rev. Edmund Morman Hall in memory of this beloved priest and tireless advocate for Our Lady of America and the Contemplative Sisters. In June of 2001 the building, except the new Cloister addition, was destroyed by fire.



The remainder of the building was razed in the summer of 2003. That original convent /cloister site called the “Cradle of the Community” for the Precious Blood sisters was declared an historical site by the Ohio Historical Society and dedicated as such on October 14, 2007.

Father Morman's letter to Most. Rev.

John A. Donovan of the Toledo diocese, dated March 17, 1980, describes the solace he had given the contemplative sisters in their time of great trial before, during and after their separation from the active group.

I was present and was able to counsel and comfort the Sisters here during their time of terrible trial, and at the death of Sister Florecita. Now on December 31, 1979 the convent was sold and all the Sisters remaining left, among them Sister M. Leandra who had taken care of Bishop George G. Rehring until he retired.

Father Morman was greatly revered by the communities he served and, when informed of the message of Our Lady of America at the time of the cloistered Sisters separation from the Precious Blood Sisters, he became a firm believer and assisted the separated sisters in any way he could. As the new spiritual director to Sister Mildred, he consoled the sisters in their sufferings, reminding them that they are “what they are, contemplative sisters,” and that they should endure in the hope that a *holy bishop* would one day come along and help them. They never renounced their permanent religious vows and he had them renew those vows again before the Blessed Sacrament to assure them.

Let it be noted here as well, with respect to an Indiana newspaper article that stated the archivist at the Sisters of the Precious Blood told him Sister Mildred had been dismissed from the community. He gave no explanation of that term and left the public with a very negative impression. You can dismiss someone from the table when you give them permission to leave. An officer dismisses another when he gives him permission to leave his presence. A sister can be dismissed when she is given permission to leave the community. The proper canonical term is exclaustation. You cannot leave one community to join another, as was the case with Sister Mildred and the Contemplative Sisters who had petitioned Rome for separation from the active group, the Sisters of the Precious Blood, without being dismissed or exclaustrated. That is always to be a freely chosen act. In Sister Mildred’s case, however, she was commanded to sign exclaustation before canonically correct, by the Superior from the active group in Dayton, OH, who physically came to New Riegel and commanded Sister Mildred, under her vow of obedience, to sign exclaustation, and then physically took the ring off Sister Midlred’s finger. This injustice and lack of charity again points to the suffering of this Sister and to her obedience, a sign of true holiness. Any sister in permanent vows, dismissed from a community for any reason, is still to be cared for by that community until all matters are handled with Rome. That was not the case here.

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