



## US Province : Centennial Retreat

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“All comes from Jesus Christ. Who else, my sisters, outside of He who called us, had a clear conception of what we were to be ? No one...” (Mother Marie Eugénie, May 2nd, 1884)

No one. Not Marie Eugénie in those early days of our Assumption ; or Mother Agnes Marguerite “opening a door in the New World,” Oct.12, 1919. No more did we sisters of the US province really know the depth of what the Lord had in store for us in our Centennial Retreat.

Sr. Veronique, our congregational archivist, generously accepted our invitation to address our full province body, gathering in Lansdale, PA. From the perspective of the archives and relying on original materials, she presented over three very full days a look back into the first one hundred years of our province. The timing was fortuitous, leading us into our provincial chapter. What we experienced was a contemplative, interactive reading of our history. Our RA DNA.

In a process like the creation of medieval tapestries, Sr. Veronique wove together threads of various colors and textures. Some threads she had gathered from the archives : by focusing on original sources, the voices of our sisters came through to us in handwritten letters and chapter documents, in photographs and in the mundane details of everyday life. Some threads were formed by the input of those of us who were part of those stories. By inviting us into the process, some threads were drawn from the work we did in connecting what we were receiving about our past to our present realities.

The Red Thread woven into the emerging pattern was the journey of Abraham and Sarah. Hearing again the familiar stories of their great faith and trust in answering the call to go into the unknown, gave insight and perspective into the struggle to establish and sustain Assumption life in this new world.

“Now the Lord said to Abram,” Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

We discovered how this same experience of leaving the familiar and pushing out into the deep water, was lived repeatedly through the years by so many of our sisters. They experienced wide contrasts in culture : from Auteuil to Philadelphia to Miami to Bay Haven. And even to Mexico ! Impelled by the Spirit and responding to their times, they journeyed from the cloisters of Ravenhill to the urban reality of West Philadelphia to the desert landscapes of Chaparral...”to give ourselves without reserve to a plan which unfolds into the unknown.” (Mother Marie Eugénie, May 2nd, 1884)

This contemplative reading was not without surprises ! Many of us were not aware that there were several unsuccessful attempts to found in the United States before Ravenhill ; or the chain of events that led to our coming to Philadelphia. With a total of fifteen communities over one hundred years, our presence was felt from Quebec to Florida, from Wisconsin to North Carolina ! Seeing actual photographs, listening to stories particular to those communities, their successes and failures, brought a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of our province’ history. We learned that not only did Sr. Isabel Eugénie found a Montessori teachers program at Ravenhill, but she led the effort to bring that pedagogy to poor children in the Philadelphia School District. In the 1960’s, Ravenhill was a center for discussions around ecumenism, civil rights and liturgical renewal : the community celebrated outdoor Masses ! We saw how dramatic changes in the Church, religious life and American society in the 1970s and ‘80s impacted our sisters and formed the ground of the next generation.

One very touching moment occurred when, in discussing the pre-foundation times, we learned that Marie Eugenie had wanted a foundation in the US. "We have long desired to have a home in the United States." Many sisters were moved to tears ! Knowing that we were in her heart from the beginning seemed to confirm her presence among us now.

For myself, I feel even more rooted in the Assumption. The contemplative dimension of our retreat - liturgy, ritual and periods of silence - allowed me to reflect on and integrate what I was receiving. Opportunities for sharing allowed me to articulate my experience and be open to the experiences of my sisters, past and present. There is a tangible connection. I realize that in the telling of those stories, I have been woven into an unfinished tapestry... A work in progress, "unfolding into the unknown."

"The one who cannot look back at where she's been,  
Cannot arrive at where she wants to go."

The image that emerges through this living tapestry reveals more than the sum of past and present events. By knowing our past, we became more grounded in who we are now. In understanding where we have come from and being fully present to the now, we can move boldly into our future.

*Sr. Catherine Anne Soley, R.A.*

<https://www.assumpta.org/US-Province-Centennial-Retreat>