

80 Years of Joyful Apostolate

The Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart

By *SISTER SOPHIA FARKAS, SDSH*

It was 80 years ago when Servant of God Ida Peterfy on her 18th birthday dedicated her life to God in Hungary. Prior to her commitment, during a three-day silent retreat, she experienced the personal love of God so deeply and powerfully that it led her to make a private vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience with the permission of her confessor, and she started to live a life of total dedication to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Very soon Ida's love for God and faith-filled zeal inspired other young women to join her.

The young Community did not have an easy start: finding the way to catechize during World War II and then under the Soviet Communist occupation had constant challenges and dangers. However, the Sisters were not deterred in making God's name and love known and continued their apostolate secretly, under cover at the risk of their own lives. Eventually in 1949 the Sisters escaped from Hungary – in pairs by the help of smugglers – with the hope that they would return when religious freedom would be restored.

Our Sisters spent six years in Canada where they learned English, and took on manual work to earn money for a home and start a printing press. They moved to Los Angeles in 1956 at the invitation of Cardinal James McIntyre who supported our Community whole-heartedly. Then the Community grew in international membership and in extended apostolate in California and Nevada. We opened our convent in Taiwan in 1986, where our Sisters serve in the medical field as well as evangelizing and catechizing. After socialism ended in Hungary, our Sisters were able to return and reestablished a convent and a catechetical center in Budapest in 1992.

Sister Ida passed away on February 8, 2000. She received the title of Servant of God in 2015, when Archbishop Jose

Gomez invited all the Catholic faithful to bring to his attention any testimony of her life of holiness and intercessory power.

With 47 Sisters in three continents we have been faithful to our original mission to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ through catechetical and retreat work.

We teach the truths of our Catholic faith according to the Church's teaching and with the dynamic and engaging Five Step Illustrated Method that was developed by Sister Ida and has been an effective instrument since the beginning. Our Sacred Heart Retreat Camp at Big Bear (CA) and our Heart of Jesus Retreat Center in Santa Ana (CA) have thousands of retreatants all year long. Right now, due to the COVID pandemic our teaching and retreat work has been transformed to online teaching and retreats.

We know that the "Call" is first and foremost the work of the Holy Spirit; meanwhile nourishing and fostering religious vocations is the responsibility of all of us. We want to witness the treasure of our Lord's Call to consecration by our prayer and sacramental life, also by the true sisterly spirit within us; and with our joyful apostolate. Most of us had previous contact with our Community before we entered, and many of us volunteered in our Camps or parish programs; therefore, it is still our main focus within vocation promotion. We also go to various events (R.E. Congress, SCRC, Focus Conferences, UCCC, Diocesan Vocation events etc.) to be present and reach out to young adults by calling the awareness to consecrated life. In September 2019 we started a monthly spiritual gathering for young women in our Novitiate House that helped them to grown in their union with God. It is still ongoing through Zoom. Since the pandemic we had to move all our vocation activities into the digital world: weekly prayer groups via Zoom; biweekly convent tours and discernment conversations with vocation stories; online presentations at New-

man Centers and young adult groups; and increasing social media outreach. We continue spiritual companionship and personal conversations with young women via Zoom or phone to help them to seek and find God's will, and to make them more familiar with our consecrated life.

Consecrated life is a gift of God so we fervently pray to the Master of the Harvest to send new vocations to priesthood and religious life. As a cherished part of vocation promotion, we readily offer up our daily challenges for future vocations. We strive to live our vowed life with faithfulness and gratitude and to radiate God's abiding love and His fulfilling joy. The best "living vocation poster" is a Sister filled with joy and content with God's infinite love.



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