

## Chapter 16

### How Cecilia Educated Her Novices



One fall day in 1894, so interesting was Maurice Duffy's class that the novice bell ringer (she admitted in 1967) became so absorbed in reading for it that she missed ringing the examen bell.<sup>1</sup> Then she rushed into a Council meeting to apologize to Mother Cecilia for being late.



Cecilia, amused by the idea of someone so caught by geology, gave teacher Maurice Duffy (at center) a smile of congratulation. Mother's response to the young bell ringer was characteristically mild. "Oh," she said, consulting her pocket watch, "that's not so bad—only ten minutes. Ring it now instead."



Maurice Duffy was not the only interesting teacher serving on the Council. That same year Crescentia Markey arrived as newly elected Council secretary and instructor in Christian Doctrine. Novices could see her pacing her school room nightly and hear her reading Kinkead<sup>2</sup> aloud to prepare for the next day's religion class.



**Teachers of Novitiate Normal classes** during the late 1890s (top to bottom): Crescentia Markey\*, Loyola Rutherford\*, Maurice Duffy\*, Antonia Durkin, Sebastian Courtney\*. (\* names marked with this symbol are also on Cecilia's Council.)

Crescentia, a teacher in the group planning to set up the curriculum at St. Mary, the new Chicago high school, also advocated memorizing the Gospel of John, two verses a night. A woman of many interests, she noted in her Diary that one night she and the novices viewed the conjunction of the moon, Jupiter, and Venus as well as a display of meteors in the northern sky. The heavenly fireworks caused her to comment on the Apocalypse and Dante's "Divine Comedy," recently finished in a

novice literature class. Council member Baptist Seeley's Catechism of Perseverance followed Crescentia's on Christian Doctrine.

Preparing novices took on more and more of the academic as word came of increased requirements in Normal schools. Not to appear remiss, legislatures now voted in minimal school and teacher qualifications. Novice Teresita Butler ("from the University of Iowa," according to Agnese Gibbs) joined the Mt. Carmel staff as instructor in Latin, adding that subject to Cecilia's novitiate curriculum. Most postulants managed a semester in Latin before Christmas. A few in Teresita's set finished the first year before going out to teach. The handful back at the motherhouse because of health or youth added a second year in Latin and completed Harkness, an 1891 text.

Some good teachers had already met with novice classes on the Mt. Carmel campus under the canopy of the Mt. St. Joseph Extension. In 1892, a recuperating Mary Michael Nihill returned from surgery in Des Moines to initiate novices into first year rhetoric and composition. Lewine Enderle's MEMOIR labels Michael "brilliant—she excelled in English and poetry." During this time, Michael Nihill also collected quotes from older Sisters for the annals she never found time to write. Instead she passed on her batch of quotes to Pulcheria McGuire to use in the ANNALS Mother Gertrude asked her to do in her spare time. In 1904, Pulcheria completed, hectographed and sent her ANNALS to community convents for reading during meals.

Instruction on the Augsburg method in drawing and perspective given by BVM artist St. James Mellon from The Mount, rounded out the novitiate course of studies. Novice schedules show them in class most of the morning, but according to the memories of Sisters at Mt. Carmel in 1967, classes could be suspended by funerals, laundry or the apple harvest. The academic program also depended on demands made on their teachers, most of them on the Council or borrowed from faculty at Mt. St. Joseph. Novice education, though improved, was not quite as stable as Cecilia might wish.

Of course, the young Sisters sent out to fill a vacancy in classrooms missed the classes described above. To improve the quality of education in parish schools and to share methods, Cecilia called a meeting of superiors and master teachers for the summer of 1894.<sup>3</sup> Preparation for this July workshop and retreat at Mt. Carmel included a six-day start-up period to discuss the schools in general and the education of Sisters in particular. By May of 1894, plans for the workshop were definite enough to duplicate and

send as an agenda. In some instances, a note accompanied the schedule specifying a topic for a Sister to present.

According to the report, superiors brought their principals with them to examine uniformity in school work, order in classrooms and halls, methods of teaching, types of grading, helps in giving religious instruction, kinds of exams, and a possible separation of boys and girls in co-educational schools. The mini-convention opened on July 5, 1894, with a general lecture on education by the retreat master, Fr. Rigge, SJ, from Creighton.<sup>4</sup>

The 1894 meeting split into committees which elected a chair and recommended action on school and convent questions. Twice each day for a week, panels of Sisters gave background on current problems, offered solutions, then opened the discussion to the floor. Panelists featured the congregation's best. Besides Agnes Burke, Lambertina Doran, Michael Nihill and Crescentia Markey, participants heard Annunciation Hannon, Philippa Sheridan, Benedicta Prendergast, Ascension Lilly and Hilary O'Regan, the spark about to ignite the central high in Chicago.<sup>5</sup>

At the meeting's end the assembly proposed that teachers with five or more years of experience prepare a course of studies. The committee set up a three-step process aimed at establishing a uniform curriculum for all BVM schools.<sup>6</sup> Cecilia asked that this course of study be given to new BVM teachers to try out with the help of master teachers.

Workshop presenters suggested teachers examine texts, list them and send in methods for their use together with criticisms. Specifically pinpointed as areas for improvement, classroom singing and drawing plus a weekly period of music and art became important in most parish schools.<sup>7</sup> The plan would be only partly successful. Except in boarding schools, the further suggestion of adding language and science classes could not be implemented. Not enough Sisters were prepared to teach them.

Outside of the scheduled workshop, there were the usual informal hallway exchanges. One of those noted in Crescentia (Diary) occurred between Crescentia and Agnes Burke. Unfortunately, the Diary mentions only the topic, (religion in summer school) but not the discussion. Agnes Burke, superior of St. Agatha seminary (on the doorstep of the University of Iowa in Iowa City), was very aware of the pulse of that educational world. Since Agnes was Cecilia's aunt, she may have shared ideas with Cecilia as well as warning her to prepare for rising standards.

As states moved toward regulation of teacher training, the number of classes and pupils at BVM schools increased, leaving less time for teacher education. Understanding both pressures, Cecilia firmly refused most offers of new schools during her first term, 1894-97.

Even if the Sisters had time, where would they find classes? Try as she and her talented personnel may, they could not change regulations that kept Sisters from attending the few State colleges that accepted women. Nor could they move Church authorities to lift restrictions so that women, particularly teaching Sisters, might do course work at Catholic universities.

In the mid-1890s it looked as if nothing would ever change. However, things fell into the right sequence during the next dozen years giving Cecilia the wedge she was seeking. By 1910, she could reach the key to educating women religious. When she turned the lock and opened the door, six BVMs registered at Catholic U. for programs leading to bachelor degrees.

Within a year and a half, five had earned a BA. The sixth, Evangela Henthorne, who started with no college credits, needed only six months more for hers.<sup>8</sup> By then, Antonia Durkin had gone on to an MA and Regina Cosgrove, Crescentia Markey and Lambertina Doran were in close pursuit of it. In future time, Evangela would be found at the University of Illinois working for her PhD in history.

A great rush of energy filled the congregation. Plans for two women's colleges—one with Marquette in Milwaukee; one with DePaul in Chicago—took shape immediately—invitations coming from the two Universities, only to be quashed by new Bishop John Keane of Dubuque. The bishop used World War I to discourage plans for the two colleges. The initial euphoria faded. To please the bishop the BVM Council shelved the Chicago college until “better times.”

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## Notes to Chapter 16

1. Examen was a period of time set aside twice a day for giving thanks for blessings and asking for grace to become a better person. In one two-minute section of examen, each Sister looked at her day and picked one thing to improve on. Examen lasted for 10 minutes in the chapel at noon and 10 more at the end of the day. The novice rang the bell five minutes before so everyone had time to reach the chapel.

2. Kinkead is the author of a text to explain lesson plans in the Baltimore catechism for religion teachers. It provided background as well as a variety of methods.

3. A superiors' retreat at Mt. Carmel was not unusual. Adding a workshop to it for principals and master teachers was. See Coogan2 249.

4. Actually, BVMs at St. Francis Academy in Council Bluffs begun an informal partnership with the Jesuits at Creighton. Jesuit lectures convinced them of women's ability and desire to learn so that Creighton became the first Catholic university to open its classrooms to Sisters in summer school. Coogan2 419 ff.

5. Master teacher Ascension Lilly became Mother in 1912. The year after this meeting, Lambertina Doran published LESSONS IN LITERATURE, a reader in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. In 1911, she also reworked Pulcheria's ANNALS, including it almost verbatim as part of IN THE EARLY DAYS in 1911. BVM Jane Coogan's THE PRICE OF OUR HERITAGE considerably expanded Lambertina in 1975-76 by including Doris Walsh's notes on Gertrude and Cecilia with her own research.

6. The reporting committee proposed a three-step operation. Year #1 each mission prepared and tried a course of study; revised, exchanged and commented on these during Year #2. Sent the course adopted to a reviewing board at Mt. Carmel for incorporation into a general course in Year #3.. Then the course of studies had a five-year period of trial. Final Phase: all missions reported on strengths and weaknesses. A school could adapt the course to its particular circumstances, but eventually all would have one main course of studies throughout BVM schools.

7. Texts and methods in music and art needed careful attention. Teacher training had been minimal. Boarding schools already included both subjects in regular classes.

8. Essentially, training of Sister-teachers in the U.S. became a no-brainer. Though prejudice against educating women was even stronger within the Church than in society, Sisters in the U.S. successfully changed the policy re/Sisters at Catholic U. partly because they taught all children in Catholic schools. To insure a good education for their boys and to be relieved of teaching women, pastors and bishops had to educate the Sisters.

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