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NEH Participant, 2010

Institutional context:

When classes begin in September 2010, Southwestern High School arguably will have the most culturally diverse student body of any high school in Detroit. Our students are as likely to come from across the globe as from around the block. In addition to the general education program, we offer an ELL (Early Language Learner) program, and we accommodate students with autism spectrum disorders, cognitive impairments, and hearing loss. I am a guidance counselor at Southwestern. My belief in the importance of lifelong learning for all members of our educational community causes me to search for educational opportunities that might be of interest to our teaching staff.

When I applied to attend “The Many and the One—Religion, Pluralism, and American History,” I did not have a study topic in mind, but it occurred to me I might have the opportunity to develop materials that could be used for spiritual formation. I have been a catechist in years past at my church, and I enjoy presenting material for the edification of others. In conversation with the adult education director at my church, I determined that a presentation on a worthy topic would be a welcome addition to the repertoire of lectures presented from time to time in the church library on Sunday mornings during the 10:30 service. Attendees at these lectures are likely to be educators themselves; should someone indicate interest in a presentation for a group to which he or she belongs, I would be pleased to oblige.

Lecture content:

Biographies of the saints are traditionally studied to inspire one to live life more fully. An informed discussion of the life of a saint may encourage people to work more diligently to improve the lives of others, or to persevere in the face of difficult life situations. Because stories about the saints can be very engaging, children learning about saints may be encouraged to see the saints as role models.

To this end, I am in the process of creating presentations on the life of St. Mother Theodore Guerin in fulfillment of a requirement of NEH institute attendance. Prior to attending “The Many and the One—Religion, Pluralism, and American History,” I had never heard of Mother Theodore, who was canonized in 2006. I actually was searching for information about St. Elizabeth Ann Seton when I first saw St. Mother Theodore’s name. Upon further investigation, I learned that St. Mother Theodore Guerin came from France to establish schools in Indiana in the nineteenth century. Since the institute I attended was held Indianapolis, it seemed fitting to study a saint from Indiana, whose base of operations was in Terre Haute, scarcely more than an hour’s drive from IUPUI.

Mother Theodore was not only a devoted woman of the church, but also an amazing businesswoman who worked for a most difficult boss who continually tried to thwart her progress. Her biography is thus inspiring on two levels. To those who share the belief system of Mother Theodore, a study of her life may inspire the student to follow her example of service to others, to emulate her devotional life, and to petition her intercession. To those interested in the history of women’s changing roles in society, Mother Theodore represents the pinnacle of success for an educated woman who chose to educate others’ children rather than to raise a family of her own. She built an educational empire in the face of discrimination, persecution, and scarcity of funding at a time in the history of the United States when few women worked outside the home. The title of a biography written by Benny Blaker Mitchell in 2006 aptly calls Saint Mother Theodore “A woman for all time.”

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Halter, Rosemary K. “Blessed Mother Theodore Guerin, Bishop Celestine de la Hailandiere, and their seven-year “Time of Trials,” 1840-1847. Master’s Thesis, University of Dayton, 2001. Examines the conflict between St. Mother Theodore and Bishop Hailandiere.

Life and Life-work of Mother Theodore Guerin by a Member of the Congregation. New York: Benizer Brothers, 1904. Sixty-seven copies available in libraries, according to “First Search” <http://firstsearch.oclc.org>, accessed 7/28/2010. Copy available in the Philanthropic Room at the IUPUI library at Indianapolis. This book is also available in its entirety on the web at

www.mothertheodore.org/ referenced below.

Mitchell, Penny Blaker. Mother Theodore Guerin—Saint of God. Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana: Sisters of Providence, 2006. Includes photographs of Mother's childhood home in France, people important in her life, and the church at St.-Mary-of-the-Woods, as well as early drawings of buildings at St.-Mary of-the-Woods, and photos of the events surrounding her canonization in Rome.

Mug, Sister Mary Theodosia, ed. Journals and Letters of Mother Theodore Guerin. Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana: Sisters of Providence, 2005. Fourth Printing, first printed 1937. Sister Mug experienced one of the miracles attributed to St. Mother Theodore.

St. Mother Theodore—Sisters of Providence. www.mothertheodore.org/ This website is exceedingly thorough. Photos of St. Mother Theodore's original diary as preserved by the Indiana Historical Society, of personal items used by St. Mother Theodore, of the college, of the canonization ceremony in Rome, all can be seen here. Check the "Archives" on the site to find the diary.

Young, Julie. A Belief in Providence. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2007. This book is suitable for middle school students.