



“You Shall Know the Truth”

An Account of Recent Events at

The Philadelphia Carmel

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On the morning of April 9th, 2021, 9 Carmelite Nuns, with 3 novices, quietly left their Monastery at 1400 66th Ave, Philadelphia, to begin the long drive back to their former home at Valparaiso, Nebraska, leaving one 80-year-old Sister alone in the Monastery. No explanation was given at the time, but soon various traditionalist websites were posting articles with screaming headlines: **“OCD Carmelites of Philadelphia abandon their cloister; flee to Nebraska for unknown reasons.”**¹ **“Sudden so far unexplained departure of Philadelphia Carmelites.”**² **“Philly Carmelites departure confirmed by three priestly sources...so when will kneeling be banned?”**³

¹ <https://nonvenipacem.com/2021/04/12/breaking-ocd-carmelites-of-philadelphia-abandon-their-cloister-flee-to-nebraska-for-unknown-reasons/>

² <https://wdtprs.com/2021/04/sudden-so-far-unexplained-departure-of-philadelphia-carmelites/>

³ <https://nonvenipacem.com/2021/04/14/update-philly-carmelites-departure-confirmed-by-three-priestly-sources-so-when-will-kneeling-be-banned/>

Some of the facts in these articles were true: the Nuns had left, and no explanation was given. The departure remained unexplained, but not for long. Since no explanation was given, emotion and imagination filled in the gap. However, as one character in an unusual murder mystery said, *“Give me research. After all, the truth of anything at all doesn’t lie in someone’s account of it. It lies in all the small facts of the time... Truth isn’t in accounts but in account books.”* *“A neat phrase,” Grant said, complimentary. “Does it mean anything?”* *“It means everything. The real history is written in forms not meant as history. In Wardrobe accounts, in Privy Purse expenses, in personal letters, in estate books.”*⁴ In other words, history is to be found in documents established at the time of events. The Nuns who left the Philadelphia Carmel on April 9th made no statement at the time, but they had made many statements before their departure, statements in print in the documents that were written at the time, statements which show their intentions of departure before they acted on them. If they had made these intentions known at the time, they would have spared much anguish to themselves and to others.

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The Philadelphia Carmel was founded in 1902 and became known as the cradle for devotion to St. Therese of Lisieux in the United States. *“The foundresses of the Carmel of Philadelphia were in direct contact with the Carmel in Lisieux...The Carmel of Lisieux made Philadelphia Carmel a depot for a vast quantity of literature and souvenirs which then passed throughout the United States and beyond...In 1907, Celine painted a large oil portrait of St. Therese for the Carmel of Philadelphia.”*⁵



But Carmelite life involves more than devotional objects. As the Philadelphia Carmelites themselves wrote, as the years progressed, there were *“Strong Winds of Change - In 1869-1879, Baltimore’s Cardinal Gibbons had been a delegate to the First Vatican Council, a worldwide Catholic conclave that produced its share of controversy. But its effect on the Church paled in comparison with the results of the Second Vatican*

⁴ Tey, Josephine. *The Daughter of Time* (Inspector Alan Grant Book 5) (pp. 142 & 144). Scribner. Kindle Edition.

⁵ “Carmel in the United States - 1790 to 1990”, *The Queen’s Press*, Eugene, Oregon, 1990, pp. 25-6

Council, 1962-65. Here, well-intentioned revisions in Canon Law and sweeping liturgical reforms led to unexpected upheavals that affected almost every area of Catholic life.

“The Discalced Carmelites were not immune to these upheavals. Their tradition-rooted cloistered Order, bound by strict rule of discipline hundreds of years old, was buffeted by winds of change, blowing from within and without. Some Carmelite monasteries made sweeping changes ranging from their mode of dress to their interpretation of the demands of the cloister.

“The Philadelphia Carmel views the challenges to religious life contained in documents issued by the Church since the Second Vatican Council as offering inspiring guidelines for authentic spiritual renewal.

“The community has always striven to conform to the high ideals of the Church’s teaching and the doctrines of its Holy Mother, St. Teresa of Jesus, well proven structures for lives dedicated to unceasing prayer and penance. As St. Teresa said, ‘I would like us, my sisters, to strive very much for these great virtues... being in a monastery is a big help.’ (Way, 15, 3, 12, 15)

“Since 1979, a number of Carmels sharing the same ideals and spirit have been affiliated with the Philadelphia Carmel in The Association of St. Joseph. The principal aims of this association - which has created a fraternal and moral bond among its members are: loving obedience to the Holy Father and the magisterium of the Church, fostering fidelity to the Rule, Constitutions and documents concerning contemplative communities and enclosure issued by the Holy See, and giving strong witness that prayer is their primary apostolate.”⁶

The idea of contemplative communities coming together to form associations or federations strikes some as a new-fangled development. However, it can be traced back to the Charter of Charity of the Cistercians which was approved in 1119. More recently, the idea was strongly encouraged by Pope Pius XII in the Apostolic Constitution *Sponsa Christi*, which was promulgated on November 21, 1950.

The situation in which many cloistered, contemplative monasteries found themselves after World War II called for a practical response on the part of the Holy See and of the monasteries: *“in fact there are not a few monasteries, unfortunately, which suffer hunger, misery, and starvation: and because of domestic difficulties many lead a hard life which is no longer tolerable. Some others, even though they do not live in poverty, remain however completely isolated from other monasteries, and often die out.”*

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⁶ “Carmel in Philadelphia - The First Hundred Years” , Carmelite Monastery, Philadelphia, 2002, pp. 34 & 37

⁷ *Sponsa Christi*, p. 6

The Church continued to encourage cloistered communities to join together in mutual support, and after the Second Vatican Council, several Carmels in the United States formed different associations. In 1976, the Philadelphia Carmel joined with several other conservative Carmels, including the Flemington Carmel, to form the St. Joseph's Association.

Unlike a Congregation, such as the Congregation of the Passionist Nuns, an association is not a governing organization. It is an organization for support and help to the members. The St. Joseph's Association was extremely simple. There were no elections: the Prioresses of the member Carmels took turns every three years to be the Coordinator or a Councilor. The principal aims of the Association are "to bear witness of loving obedience to the Holy Father and Magisterium of the Church;" "to foster fidelity to the Rule, our Constitutions and other documents...issued by the Holy See"; "to strengthen each other "in living our Teresian charism and to "provide mutual aid."⁸

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At this time, the "Winds of Change" were blowing harshly upon the Carmelites of Philadelphia. There was a divergence of outlook among the Nuns, and shortly before the Philadelphia Carmel joined the St. Joseph's Association, there occurred what one of the survivors called "The Exodus in the 70s": a significant number of the Nuns left the Philadelphia Carmel for other Carmels, and some of them left religious life all together.⁹ From then on, the Community struggled to maintain an

adequate number of Nuns. Carmelites came from other Carmels, for shorter or longer periods of temporary transfers. Unlike Benedictines, Carmelites do not make a vow of stability which binds them to that community for life. However, on making her solemn profession a Carmelite is incardinated into her Community and it is a very special and unusual circumstance which would make her change to another Carmel. A Sister cannot be transferred without her free consent and that of the Chapters of both communities. This is always challenging. Though Discalced Carmelite communities share the same spirituality, each Carmel lives it in its unique spirit and expression. To transfer from the Community where one was formed to another, is like going from one's birth family to live with cousins one has seldom met. This can be very bewildering, both spiritually and

⁸ St. Joseph's Association - 1996 Statutes

⁹ Account of a Carmelite temporarily transferred to the Philadelphia Carmel

psychologically, both for the Sister who makes the transfer and for the community who receives her. And the close contact with one another which is the result of our enclosed contemplative life makes the challenge even greater.

The Philadelphia Carmel experienced this kaleidoscopic shifting of relationships for over 30 years. The Community never attained a measure of peaceful stability, nor did its number of members increase, in spite of nuns coming from various Carmels to keep the Carmel going. By 2012, there were only 5 Sisters in the community, one of whom was mentally impaired and unable to take part in Chapter decisions.¹⁰

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It was at this time that the possibility of Nuns coming from the Valparaiso Carmel was first suggested. The initial objection was the difference in spirit between the two communities: the Carmel of Philadelphia followed the 1991 Constitutions and the Carmel of Valparaiso followed the 1990 Constitutions. This was a serious obstacle, for *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Vatican II document on religious life, states: *There may be communities and monasteries which the Holy See, after consulting the interested local Ordinaries, will judge not to possess reasonable hope for further development. These should be forbidden to receive novices in the future. If it is possible, these should be combined with other more flourishing communities and monasteries whose scope and spirit is similar.*¹¹

The idea of Nuns coming from Valparaiso was set aside for several years and the Community continued to limp along with never more than half a dozen Nuns.

Finally, in December 2015, communications between Philadelphia and Lincoln, Nebraska, were opened to discuss the possibility of Nuns coming from Valparaiso to Philadelphia.¹² Bishop Conley was enthusiastic about the Nuns of Valparaiso, and saw the arrival of some of their Sisters as a *re-foundation" of the Philadelphia Carmel.*¹³ Moreover, he considered as a necessary condition that *the Nuns of Valparaiso would take over complete governance of the Philadelphia Carmel. Vast experience in these matters has proven that this is the only way the project could work.*¹⁴

In January 2016, one of the nuns who had temporarily transferred to the Philadelphia Carmel wrote to Archbishop Chaput concerning the proposed advent of Nuns from Valparaiso. She had been for a year in the Carmel of Elysburg, a daughter-house of Valparaiso, and she knew from experience the spirit of the Valparaiso/Elysburg

¹⁰ Timeline Regarding Concerns for Carmelite Monastery, p. 1

¹¹ *Perfectae Caritatis*, #21

¹² Email Dec. 7th, 2015 from Bishop Conley of Lincoln to Archbishop Chaput of Philadelphia

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

communities. Elysburg had been founded from Valparaiso in 2005, eleven years earlier. She describes the Elysburg Community in these terms: *They are a good and beautiful Carmel, very generously dedicated to what they believe in regarding their manner of striving for holiness, but they also have a highly particularized, detail oriented way of life, which is completely singular to them alone, and this is something that they generally do not even see because their experience of their life, is, of course, all that they know of Carmelite life. Their strictly uniform formation to the minutest details of daily, religious life, while ensuring conformity among them, is a structure unto itself that would present serious problems of integration with other Carmelites formed in a very different application of our Carmelite Charism.*¹⁵ That the Sister's comments were in no way meant to be a disparagement of the Nuns of Valparaiso and Elysburg is shown in a letter she wrote on the following day to the Vicar for Religious of the Philadelphia Archdiocese: *I would like to say to your Reverence, in a charitable defense of the Mothers of the JMJ¹⁶ Carmels, that while they can be determined in pursuing something if they feel it is for the spread of their own Carmels they are very discreet, gentle and genuinely good souls not at all domineering.*¹⁷



In April 2016, there was a Canonical Visitation of the Philadelphia Carmel by Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P. a long-time friend of the Community. At that time, the number of nuns was down to 4 Nuns and a novice. Of the 4 Nuns, three wanted to bring in nuns from Carmels outside the United States, possibly from Vietnam or the Philippines. The fourth, Mother Pia of Jesus Crucified, *believes that the future can be best secured by inviting the nuns from the Valparaiso Carmel in Lincoln, Nebraska or their foundation in Elysburg, PA, to come to revive the community. She indicated that if nuns are brought from another culture or country that after a period of time to help them*

¹⁵ Letter Jan. 20th, 2016 from Sr. Immaculata of Divine Love, O.C.D. to Archbishop Chaput, emphasis in the original

¹⁶ All the Carmels founded from Valparaiso take the name of Carmel of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Hence they are popularly known as the "JMJ Carmels".

¹⁷ Letter Jan. 21st, 2016, from Sr. Immaculata of Divine Love, O.C.D. to Msgr. Joseph Anderlonis. Emphasis in the original

*adjust that she would pursue transferring to Elysburg or Valparaiso*¹⁸. The Prioress, Mother Barbara of the Holy Ghost, feared that *a group of nuns will be imposed upon the community and set aside the current members of the community*.¹⁹ Fr. O'Donnell sums up the situation by saying that *The crisis that the community is facing can only be resolved, I believe, by bringing in a group of capable Carmelite nuns who are already formed in the Teresian ideal. Under the supervision of the present community they would gradually assume the administration of the monastery and work to attract new members.*

*As you may be aware, nuns associated with the Carmelite monasteries in Valparaiso, Kansas [sic], and Elysburg, Pennsylvania, have made some overtures to supplying the needed sisters to Philadelphia. For reasons that I outline in my report, this does not seem acceptable to the community. Rather, they are inclined to go outside the United States to seek nuns elsewhere.*²⁰

According to Fr. O'Donnell, it is the Nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg who made the overtures to the Carmel of Philadelphia. This seems to have been the impression already back in December 2015, for Bishop Conley objects to the description of "Mother Stella Maris" [sic] as "pushy".²¹

Fr. O'Donnell explains the difficulties which the Community – with the exception of Mother Pia – found in the Nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg coming to Philadelphia: *The nuns from the Valparaiso Carmel present difficulties in several ways: First, they follow a different Constitution (1990) while the Philadelphia community follows the 1991 Constitutions. Second, they require an all-Latin liturgy which Mother Pia alone among the Philadelphia nuns finds acceptable. The notion of having two celebrations of the Office in one community, one in English and another in Latin is unacceptable to the current members of the community. Third, the Valparaiso Carmel and its foundations are committed to the Extraordinary Form of the Mass and would provide a chaplain from the Fraternity of Saint Pius X to ensure this possibility. Again, the Philadelphia nuns are aware that this has implications as to the type of Catholic who would be attracted to the monastery and are reluctant to go in this direction.*²²

By November 2016, it seemed that the Philadelphia Community had accepted the fact that they could only obtain the help they needed by accepting the Nuns from

¹⁸ Canonical Visitation Report – Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., April 5th, 2016

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Email for Bishop Conley to Archbishop Chaput, Dec. 22nd, 2015

²² Canonical Visitation Report – Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., April 5th, 2016

Valparaiso and Elysburg. Bishop Conley sent to Archbishop Chaput a copy of the letter sent to the Prioress of Valparaiso from Mother Barbara, the Prioress of the Philadelphia Carmel²³ In it, Mother Barbara wrote: *We humbly ask Your Reverence to accept our request that you make a foundation. The few of us who have lived here for so many years would accept your customs and would try to make your life with us one of sisterly concord and common purpose....We hope that your [sic] will accept this request to establish yourselves in this Carmel of Philadelphia.*²⁴ Six weeks later, a letter with the signature of Mother Barbara was sent to Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, who is both a civil and a canon lawyer, asking for directions on *how to proceed canonically with the union of our two Carmels?*²⁵

There are serious questions about both these letters, the later letter of Dec. 7th and the earlier letter of Oct. 28th, 2016. To begin with, the question just quoted about *the union of our two Carmels* shows a total misunderstanding of the juridical status of Carmelite Monasteries. Discalced Carmelite Monasteries are *sui juris*, that is, each is totally autonomous. There are no “motherhouses” or “daughter- houses” in the Order of Discalced Carmelites, though a new foundation remains dependent on the Carmel from which it issues until the time when it has the requisite qualities for its own autonomy. That someone in Philadelphia should see the advent of nuns from Valparaiso as a “union of the two Carmels” raises serious questions.

Moreover, there was never any question in Philadelphia of Valparaiso making a foundation in Philadelphia, though, as we have seen, Bishop Conley in Lincoln, Nebraska, understood the situation in this way.²⁶ The Philadelphia Carmel was looking for some nuns to come and sustain the Philadelphia Community in their own way of life.

The letter of October 28th speaks of Valparaiso making “a foundation.” This idea had been expressed a year before by Bishop Conley when he wrote about Valparaiso making a “re-foundation” of the Philadelphia Carmel.²⁷ To found or re-found a Carmelite Monastery is not just a decision to be made by the Nuns and the respective Bishops. It needs permission from Rome.²⁸

Such questions are increased when one studies the two letters of Oct. 28th and Dec. 7th. The letter of October 28th has a hand-written signature which says “Mother Barbara

²³ Email exchange November 3, 2016 – Bishop Conley to Archbishop Chaput, with letter dated Oct. 28th, 2016 from the Philadelphia Carmel

²⁴ Letter October 28th, 2016

²⁵ Letter Dec. 7th, 2016 to Bishop Fitzgerald

²⁶ See email Dec. 7th, 2015 quoted above

²⁷ See email Dec. 7th, 2015 quoted above.

²⁸ Cf. can 609-1, Code of Canon Law, and *Cor orans* #29.

of the Holy Ghost, OCD Prioress". In the margin next to it is a comment: "This is not Mother Barbara's signature - But M. Pia's" The signature of the December 7th letter is typewritten: "Mother Barbara, OCD, Prioress". Again there is a comment in the margin: "Did M.B. really write this letter??"



That there were still serious questions in Philadelphia about the Nuns coming from Nebraska is shown by the letter written by Archbishop Chaput on December 19th, 2016 to Mother Therese, the Prioress of the Carmel in Rochester, New York, and on the same day to the Bishop of Rochester, Bishop Matano. To Mother Therese he explains that the Carmel in Philadelphia is in a state of crisis, with only four sisters and one novice. *Mother Barbara of the Holy Ghost, O.C.D., Prioress of the Carmel, who has guided the nuns with saintly devotion and exemplary patience, has sought means to improve this situation in order to keep this Carmel viable. Recently, efforts were made to invite nuns from the Valparaiso Foundation in Lincoln, NE to address Mother's concerns. Sadly, given the differences in liturgy, lifestyle and monastery governance, no suitable consensus for the monastery could be achieved.*²⁹ He says the same thing in his letter to Bishop Matano. Unfortunately, the Rochester Carmel was not able to send anyone to Philadelphia due to the number of sick and elderly Sisters in their own Community.³⁰

Doubts continued to surface about the suitability of the Nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg. On the advice of Mother Therese,³¹ Bishop Fitzgerald contacted Fr. Daniel Chowning, OCD, a Carmelite Friar who knows the Philadelphia Community very well. Bishop Fitzgerald had spoken with Bishop Michael Barber of Oakland, CA, who had helped a Carmelite Community in his diocese which had been founded from Valparaiso and then had experienced "interference" from Valparaiso when trying to establish its rightful autonomy.³² Bishop Fitzgerald was concerned that a similar situation may arise with the coming of Nuns from Valparaiso to Philadelphia. *I would appreciate your advice*

²⁹ Letter December 19th, 2016 to Mother Therese of Rochester Carmel

³⁰ Cf. Letter December 19th, 2016 to Archbishop Chaput from Bishop Matano, and Letter December 25th, 2016 to Archbishop Chaput from Mother Therese

³¹ Letter December 25th, 2016 from Mother Therese

³² Cf. Email February 10th, 2017 from Bishop Fitzgerald to Fr. Daniel Chowning, OCD.

*on how best to proceed to insure that it is clear both through documentation and spirit that the Philadelphia Carmel remains an autonomous monastery separate and distinct from the Valparaiso Carmel. While I understand that there will be a period of time during which there will need to be ongoing communication and contact with Valparaiso, I would also want it to be understood this would only be on a temporary or provisional basis pending stabilization of a reconstituted autonomous Carmelite monastery in Philadelphia.*³³ He is very concerned that the autonomy of the Philadelphia Carmel be guaranteed: *I am thinking of letters of transfer, some memorialization of an agreement for the initial probationary period with an expressed goal of moving toward an independent, autonomous Carmel in Philadelphia...My goal would be to have clear, memorialized understandings on both sides as we enter into this process to forestall, as much as possible, future misunderstandings.*³⁴ He ends by saying that *after a long process of considering and exhausting other alternatives, the nuns in Philadelphia have made a difficult decision and appear to be at peace with the reality of the situation and have made a courageous decision to move forward in a spirit of faith and trust.*³⁵

Unfortunately, Bishop Fitzgerald's desire to "have clear, memorialized understandings on both sides" does not seem to have been realized. Moreover, both he and Sr. Rose McDermott, a canon lawyer with long experience of the Philadelphia Carmel, urged that there be a "probationary period", "on a trial basis" to be sure that the lifestyle and customs of the Philadelphia Carmel be preserved.³⁶

There were serious objections to having the Nuns come from Valparaiso, but Bishop Fitzgerald wrote: *Archbishop Chaput, while not enthusiastic about a Traditional Community coming to Philadelphia, is determined to maintain a Carmel here and is of the mind that a Traditional Community is preferable to no community. After much discussion on this point he is unwavering that we should invite "Valparaiso" to send members to Philadelphia at least for a period of probation.*³⁷

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One of the first steps towards the new situation was the change in Constitutions. The four Nuns in Philadelphia voted to change from the 1991 Constitutions to the 1990 Constitutions.³⁸ Almost immediately after this, Mother Barbara suffered an emotional

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cf. Email May 8th, 2017 from Bishop Fitzgerald to Sr. Rose McDermott and email May 9th, 2017 from Sr. Rose McDermott to Bishop Fitzgerald

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Cf. Chapter Acts for April 18th, 2017

breakdown and had to be moved to a geriatric psychiatric unit.³⁹ The Sub-Prioress, Mother Pia of Jesus Crucified, governed the Community in her absence, and on July 11th, the remaining Nuns voted to accept the definitive transfer of 3 nuns from Elysburg, and the temporary transfer of a novice.⁴⁰

A definitive transfer to another community implies a definite, solid commitment to the new community. It is possible but seldom wise for a nun to make a definitive transfer to another community without a trial period, yet that is what happened here. We see here that the advice of Bishop Fitzgerald and Sr. Rose McDermott for a “probationary period” was ignored. A similar vote for definitive transfers was made at Valparaiso for 6 Sisters to go to Philadelphia.⁴¹



Another disturbing fact is the age of the Sisters coming to Philadelphia. A list dated September 2018 shows that none of them were over 30 years of age. It also shows that the two oldest had been solemnly professed for only three years, and the others for less than that. We do not have a document showing the formation framework of the nuns in Valparaiso or Elysburg, but, when the Valparaiso Nuns had moved to Philadelphia, the time for formation given in the Visitation Report of September 14th, 2018 says that formation lasts for a maximum of 4 years and 6-8 months.⁴² If this was the formation period once the Sisters came to Philadelphia, it is to be presumed that they brought with them the formation framework which was used at Valparaiso and Elysburg. The two oldest had made their solemn profession

three years before coming to Philadelphia, so they would have had less than 8 years' experience of living the Carmelite life. It is very questionable if they had the experience necessary to guide and form others in the Teresian charism. Moreover, with only three years from their solemn profession, it is virtually impossible for either of them to have

³⁹ Email May 8th, 2021 From Bishop Fitzgerald to Sr. Rose McDermott

⁴⁰ Chapter Acts July 10th and 11th, 2017 of the Philadelphia Carmel and June 26th, 2017 of the Elysburg Carmel

⁴¹ Cf. Chapter Acts June 30th, 2017 of the Valparaiso Carmel

⁴² Canonical Visitation Report September 14th, 2021

had any experience of a leadership position. Mother Barbara had expected a group of *mature Sisters who would have been professed for at least 10 years.*⁴³ With 40 nuns in Valparaiso, were these truly the best qualified to build up a dying community?

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In preparation for the arrival of the Nuns, a Timeline of events shows a series of exchanges of letters between Mother Teresa, the Prioress of Valparaiso, and Bishop Fitzgerald, the auxiliary bishop responsible for the religious in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.⁴⁴ The primary question mentioned is who is to be the Prioress, since Mother Barbara is in the hospital? A period of probation of one year is suggested, at the end of which there should be a canonical visitation. The Prioresses of both Valparaiso and Elysburg are willing to help out the new superior if necessary.

The arrival of the Nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg was made known to the outside world by an article in the CatholicPhilly describing the Solemn High Mass on July 26th, 2017.⁴⁵ The next incident recorded in the Timeline is the need to arrange for the solemn professions of three of the newly arrived Nuns, possibly to take place in the beginning of 2018.⁴⁶

Mother Barbara died in August, 2018.⁴⁷ . By this time, it appears that, with the exception of Mother Pia all the original nuns of the Philadelphia Community have left. On a list dated September 2018, Mother Pia is the only Nun of the original Community listed.⁴⁸ In September, there took place the Canonical Visitation conducted by Bishop Fitzgerald and Sr. Gabrielle Mary Braccio, RSM, the Delegate for Consecrated Life in the Archdiocese. Various facets of the life of the Nuns were reviewed: spiritual life, health, finances, community life, the liturgy, the daily schedule. All of these were in good order. The Nuns *expressed that the transfer from Valparaiso to Philadelphia was difficult; some needing to get use to the city noise; others just adjusting from being away from the monastery of Valparaiso and the nuns there. Presently, all could say that life is more peaceful and ordered and they experience a spirit of charity and joy.* There was no formation plan, and it was suggested that one be drawn up. A difficult matter was the question of governance: *Mother Teresa asked if there was a possibility of being connected*

⁴³ Email from Sr. Gabrielle Mary Braccio, RSM, Delegate for Religious Life to Bishop Fitzgerald, March 3, 2021

⁴⁴ Timeline : Entries for June 30th and July 3rd, 2017

⁴⁵ Cf. <https://catholicphilly.com/2017/08/news/local-news/philadelphia-carmelites-welcome-10-new-nuns-to-monastery/>

⁴⁶ Timeline, Entry for September 12th, 2017

⁴⁷ Timeline, Entry August. 8th, 2018

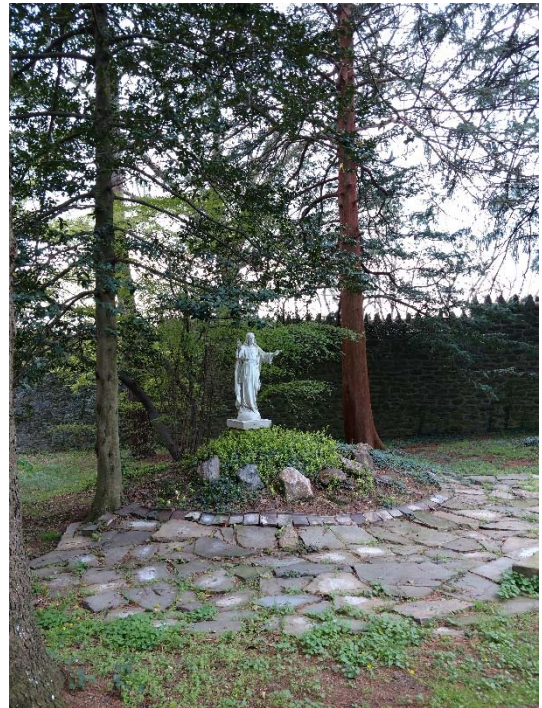
⁴⁸ List of Sisters' Names and Profession Dates – September 2018

*to Valparaiso since all are quite young in Carmel in Philadelphia. It was emphasized that the autonomy of Carmel is important. Mother Teresa is presently in close contact with Mother Teresa in Valparaiso out of necessity as to how to manage the monastery and govern and care of the nuns.*⁴⁹

The matter of elections was discussed: This raises the question of who had governed the Community until then. Mother Barbara, the Prioress, had been in the hospital since May 2017, and Mother Pia, as Sub-Prioress, had presided at the Chapter votes. In the months before the Nuns arrived from Valparaiso and Elysburg, various suggestions had been put forward: that the sub-prioress of Elysburg should govern or that Mother Teresa of Valparaiso should appoint a superior. Now they were faced with the fact that, except for Mother Pia, none of the nuns fulfilled the requirements of age and seniority for election as Prioress.

It was decided that *Elections will take place on October 1, 2018... From the present Constitutions, qualifications to be elected Prioress is that the nun should have completed 35 years of age and five years since her solemn profession in the order. Postulation will have to be enacted since all the nuns are under 35 except for Mother Pia' and all are less than five years from solemn vows other than Mother Pia.*⁵⁰

The postulation was sent to Rome, along with a request to change from the 1991 Constitutions to the 1990 Constitutions, and another request to transfer from the St. Joseph's Association to the Santa Teresa Association in Spain. We have seen that the Philadelphia Community had voted in April 2017 to change from the 1991 Constitutions to the 1990 Constitutions. Apparently, no confirmation of this had come from Rome. It would take nearly two years and several letters from Archbishop Chaput and later from Archbishop Perez for the confirmation to arrive on June 10th, 2020, allowing the Nuns to follow the 1990 Constitutions.⁵¹



⁴⁹ Canonical Visitation Report September 14th, 2021

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Cf. Timeline entry June 10th, 2020

The confirmation of the postulation of Mother Teresa of St. Augustine as Prioress took much less time, being dated December 10th, 2018, and arriving on January 2nd, 2019.

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The request to transfer from the St. Joseph's Association to the Santa Teresa Association proved to be a complicated matter. In 2018, there was a rumor that the Santa Teresa Association in Spain would be granted an exemption from the demands of *Cororans*, and about a dozen Carmels in North and South America expressed the desire to transfer to that Association. The Carmel of Philadelphia, with the support of Archbishop Chaput, sent in their application for transfer.⁵³ Though the St. Joseph's Association was *sorry to have one of the founding members leave*, the President of the Association was *happy to know that Your Excellency [Archbishop Chaput] approves the desire of the Community to transfer to another Association*.⁵⁴ The President also writes to Archbishop Carballo, submitting the request of the Philadelphia Carmel to transfer to the Spanish Association, and adding *If the Nuns of the Philadelphia Carmel experience a greater affinity of spirit with the Carmels of the Santa Teresa Association in Spain, then the St. Joseph's Association is at peace with their desire to transfer*.⁵⁵

The reply came back very quickly: The note in the Timeline says: *November 8, 2018 Degree from Holy See declares Philadelphia Carmel as member of St. Joseph Association. Mother Teresa writes to Bishop Fitzgerald confused as this Association was the one they asked to leave and to join the other. Mother Teresa contacted Mother Maria Lourdes, President of the Spanish Association who will follow up with the paper work to Rome*.⁵⁶

However, Rome decided that *all applications for membership in the Santa Teresa Association from monasteries outside Spain have been refused*; ⁵⁷ Considering that the Santa Teresa Association already numbered 52 Spanish Carmels as members, it is understandable that Rome would refuse to increase their number. This meant that the Philadelphia Carmel remained a member of the St. Joseph's Association.⁵⁸ On January 7th,

⁵² Timeline Entries December 10, 2018 and January 2, 2019

⁵³ Letter October 1st, 2018 to Archbishop Carballo signed by the 4 Council members of the Philadelphia Carmel; also Letter October 22, 2018 from Madre Lourdes del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus, OCD, President of the Santa Teresa Association to Archbishop Carballo

⁵⁴ Letter October 9th, 2018 from Mother Therese Marie of Jesus Crucified, OCD, President of the St. Joseph's Association

⁵⁵ Letter October 16th, 2018 from Mother Therese of Jesus Crucified, President of the St. Joseph's Association to Archbishop Carballo.

⁵⁶ Timeline Entry November 8, 2018. Also Letter from Mother Maria Lourdes, President of the Santa Teresa Association to Archbishop Chaput

⁵⁷ Letter November 9th, 2019 from Archbishop Carballo to Sr. Mary Elizabeth of the Trinity, OCD, President of the St. Joseph's Association

⁵⁸ Ibid.

2020, Mother Teresa informs Bishop Fitzgerald that they had received word from the Congregation that their request to transfer was denied.⁵⁹

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While all these varied communications took place, much was going on at the Carmel. In January 2019, Mother Elizabeth, who was the sub-prioress, was named novice mistress.⁶⁰ In February, Sr. Gabrielle Mary Braccio, RSM, the Delegate of Consecrated Life in the Archdiocese, met with Mother Teresa of St. Augustine and Mother Elizabeth regarding certain matters. The Carmel had been celebrating the Extraordinary Form of the Mass in the chapel since the arrival of the Nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg, but they were requested to arrange for a Novus Ordo Mass once a month for the people who are used to that form of the Mass.⁶¹ The relationship between the Philadelphia Carmel and Valparaiso was discussed, and *from speaking with Mother Teresa, Mother Teresa of Jesus, of Valparaiso, is thrusting them forth to make decisions on their own and to trust in the grace given.*⁶² The formation guidelines were vague, and *It was encouraged that the Formation Program for basic formation and on-going formation be structured and written out and implemented.* A very important point was the place of *Cor orans* in the opinion of the Community. Sr. Gabrielle Mary records that *They have also begun studying Cor orans together as a local community, so to prepare and become familiar with what the Congregation is asking. This was highly encouraged.*⁶³ Finally, financial matters were discussed, including *the estimate on the approved chapel renovation (still pending).*⁶⁴

This would become a major matter for discussion. According to the Timeline, the request for an additional nuns' choir was sent to Archbishop Chaput on March 12th and was approved three days later.⁶⁵ The Nuns wanted to create a Mass Choir, a room where they could see the Mass more clearly without being seen by the public.⁶⁶ The estimate for the renovation was given as \$479,000.00.⁶⁷ The renovations proved to go beyond just the nuns' new room giving them a view of the altar in the Chapel. The renovations expanded

⁵⁹ Timeline Entry January 7, 2020

⁶⁰ Timeline Entries January 31 and February 7, 2019

⁶¹ Cf. Summary of Meeting with Mother Teresa of St. Augustine and Mother Elizabeth, Feb. 19, 2019 written by Sr. Gabrielle Mary Braccio

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

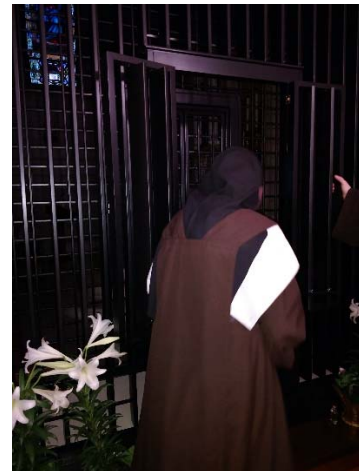
⁶⁵ Timeline Entry March 12, 2019 and Letter from Archbishop Chaput March 15, 2019

⁶⁶ This is not mentioned in any document but is obvious from the photo of the actual "Chapel Choir" installed in recent years.

⁶⁷ Timeline April 23, 2019

to include the sacristy, the Bishop's dining room and the front entrance.⁶⁸ The new Mass Choir where the nuns could assist at Mass is visible to the right of the altar.

The Chapel before and after the renovations The Mass Choir on the Nuns' side



At about this time, Mother Teresa requested permission to change the name of the Monastery from The Carmel of St. Joseph and St. Anne to The Carmel of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and St. Anne.⁶⁹ All the Carmels founded from Valparaiso were named the Carmel of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. For this reason, they were referred to as "JMJ Carmels". Archbishop Chaput questioned the wisdom of changing the name of the Philadelphia monastery, fearing this would confuse the people who come there, but he left the decision to the nuns.⁷⁰ There was no need for a legal change since the legal name of the monastery as a Corporation is The Carmelite Monastery of Philadelphia.⁷¹

The renovations which had started in the spring became problematic by the fall because at the same time the Nuns were seriously considering the possibility of moving elsewhere. They were worried about security and silence. 2019 was *the deadliest year in the city in more than a decade*.⁷² Yet *in speaking with Mother Teresa and Mother Elizabeth, they said that they had been thinking of relocating prior to the shooting around the Monastery*.⁷³ The reasons given for the desire to move were *the noise level*

⁶⁸ Summary of Meeting between Mother Teresa, Mother Elizabeth and Sr. Gabrielle Mary September 16, 2019

⁶⁹ Timeline Entry May 3 2019

⁷⁰ Timeline Entry May 7, 2019

⁷¹ <https://www.corporations.pa.gov/search/corpsearch>

⁷² <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2019/12/31/philadelphia-reaches-highest-homicide-rate-since-2007-with-2-deadly-new-years-eve-shootings/>

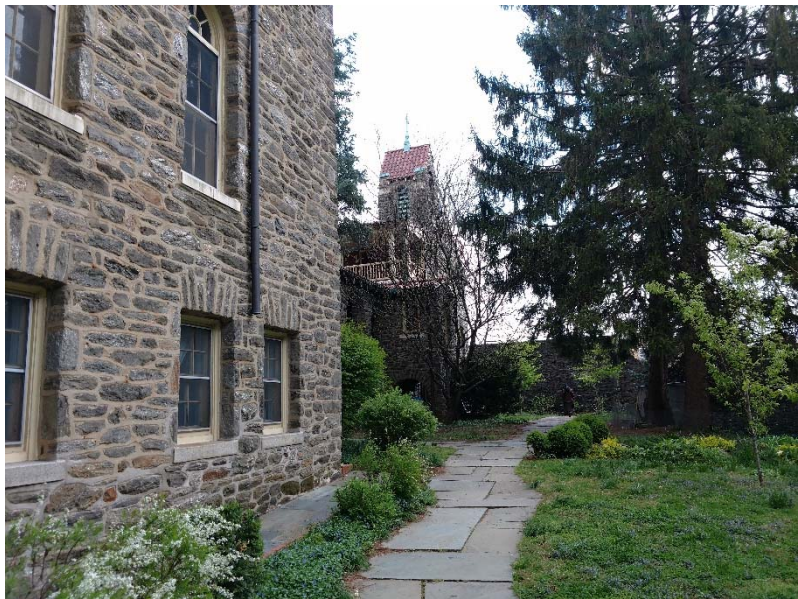
⁷³ Summary of Meeting between Mother Teresa, Mother Elizabeth and Sr. Gabrielle Mary September 16, 2019

*around the monastery; fogged windows so that no one could look in but they would like to enjoy the beauties of nature; balconies that cannot be used because of being seen by others; not comfortable being outside in their enclosure with noise, gun shots. Not conducive to living as a Cloister.*⁷⁴

Sr. Gabrielle Mary asked why they began the renovations of the monastery if they planned to move. They explained that they *knew that they would probably not relocate for about 5-10 years.*⁷⁵ Sr. Gabrielle Mary suggested that they *complete the work in process and live in the newness, at least for 10 years or so.* She then commented: *They are hoping for closer to five!*⁷⁶ This was in September 2019 and they would leave in far less than five years, for they would be gone within 18 months.

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About four weeks after the Meeting with Sr. Gabrielle Mary to discuss various concerns, Sr. Gabrielle Mary and Mother Theresa met to discuss the question of a realtor.⁷⁷ The Sisters felt unsettled, given the unrest in that area of Philadelphia. Extra security cameras were installed, but the Sisters are not happy that they should have to live that way. *They have sought advice from Mother Teresa of Valparaiso and other priests and sources since they are young and these persons have supported them in their desire to relocate.* Sr. Gabrielle Mary wrote that *I expressed to Mother Teresa that she has a mind set on wanting to relocate even though it was asked that the Community wait for at least 5-10 years. I expressed that they are all young in religion and need to trust and be obedient to the Archbishop/Bishop regarding this concern.* Finally, Sr. Gabrielle Mary suggested to *Mother Teresa to write out everything that is a concern*



⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Sr. Gabrielle Mary Braccio: Summary of Meeting with Mother Teresa and Mother Elizabeth – October 10th, 2019

*and send a letter to you so that you have it in writing.*⁷⁸

In January 2020, Mother Teresa wrote to Bishop Fitzgerald to tell him that they have received the letter from CICLSAL refusing their request to transfer to the Santa Teresa Association.⁷⁹

In June, they received the confirmation of the change from the 1991 Constitutions to the 1990 Constitutions.⁸⁰

In August, a priest of the FSSP was appointed their regular chaplain but his health was fragile, and he resigned the following month.⁸¹ The Community continued to have difficulty finding a regular confessor.⁸²

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On February 15, 2021, Mother Teresa sent Bishop Fitzgerald an account of their reasons for leaving the Monastery on 66th Ave, the reasons being the tranquility and safety of the Sisters, and of their efforts to find a suitable property elsewhere.⁸³ She ended with the statement: *Now we are prayerfully discerning the difficult option of returning to the monastery from which we came and suppressing this Carmel in Philadelphia.*⁸⁴



On March 4th, Sr. Gabrielle Mary met with Mother Teresa and Mother Elizabeth to discuss their return to Valparaiso. Sr. Gabrielle Mary asked why they had not been informed about the decision to return to Valparaiso and was told that Bishop Fitzgerald had been informed in the previous November. Sr. Gabrielle Mary replied that they knew about the nuns' desire to relocate, but not about the return to Valparaiso which shocked them all. In her account of this

meeting, Sr. Gabrielle Mary said that their minds are made up and nothing she said

⁷⁸ Ibid. Presumably "you" refers to Bishop Fitzgerald.

⁷⁹ Timeline Entry January 7, 2020

⁸⁰ Timeline Entry June 10, 2020

⁸¹ Timeline Entries August 10, September 28 and September 30, 2020

⁸² Timeline Entries October 3 and October 26, 2020

⁸³ Note February 15th, 2021 and Timeline Entry February 15, 2021

⁸⁴ Note February 15, 2021

seemed to have any effect. ⁸⁵ On the following day, Mother Teresa emailed Bishop Fitzgerald to confirm their decision to return to Valparaiso and asked for a meeting with him and some friends, including a priest who is a canon lawyer, *to help clarify any canonical and practical details of the move.* ⁸⁶

On March 23rd, Mother Pia wrote a letter in response to Sr. Gabrielle Mary's request for an account of the events leading up to the planned departure, which when Mother Pia wrote her letter was set for the end of Easter week. In her account, Mother Pia wrote: *About ten months ago, the Prioress and Sub-Prioress began looking for real estate in the suburban countryside of Philadelphia. They looked for a place that would be suitable for the relocation of the Carmelite community here in East Oak Lane. They were unable to find what they might consider a good place for relocation. The search for new property ceased about four months ago.*

The Sisters consider the city traffic and street noises detrimental to the contemplative life of prayer. Both nuns are accustomed to rural surroundings and the noise from neighboring city life has been difficult for them. We have a large enclosed garden full of tall trees and winding stone paths that is really lovely and very refreshing. They are accustomed to wide horizons and adjacent fields.

When the rioting in Philadelphia occurred, preparations were made for evacuations if it were necessary. Sometimes an occasional bullet is heard on a hot summer evening. Then helicopters hover. All of the "City life noise among the poor", our neighbors, has prodded the superiors in the direction of moving the Carmel. One can naturally understand their sentiments. However, this has been a city Carmel since 1930 when the city bought our northern property and put in 66th Avenue. We have been surrounded by population which includes a yearly block party, a onetime used car dealer with his sales broadcasts and various other colorful events. Sirens and firetrucks signal for help and we tried to give it through prayer. The community in the past felt that these neighbors and their needs were a special part of our sacrifice and prayer for the salvation of souls.

About a month ago the Prioress and Sub-Prioress told me they were considering leaving the Archdiocese of Philadelphia because they were unsuccessful in finding suitable real estate outside the city. Last week I was told that they were definitely planning to take the community to Valparaiso Nebraska. I asked them to explain further and they said that another reason for leaving was to get out of the St. Joseph Association of which this Carmel has been a member. The Prioress has been trying to withdraw. Rome said in order to do so, the Carmel must have another Association to join. Rome also said that this Carmel must cooperate with the Association statutes as long as it is a member.

⁸⁵ Email from Sr. Gabrielle Mary to Bishop Fitzgerald, March 4, 2021

⁸⁶ Email from Mother Teresa to Bishop Fitzgerald and Sr. Gabrielle Mary, March 5, 2021

There are requirements in Cor Orans that the nuns do not like and which the Association is trying to fulfill. In Nebraska the nuns hope to request exemption from certain points of the Cor Orans document and then set up their own Association. They plan to leave Philadelphia the second half of April. She added at the end of the letter that the departure date has been moved up to the end of Easter week.⁸⁷

This is in fact when they did leave. On the afternoon of Tuesday, March 23rd, 2021, the President of the St. Joseph's Association got a phone call from Mother Pia at the Philadelphia Carmel asking if the President could find some nuns to *help close up the Carmel* since the other Nuns were planning to go back to Valparaiso at the beginning of April and she would be left alone.⁸⁸ The President immediately contacted Archbishop Perez, since a Community cannot just walk out of a monastery for which they have taken responsibility.⁸⁹ Through Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, the auxiliary bishop responsible for institutes of religious life in the Archdiocese, Archbishop Perez delivered a letter to Mother Teresa of St. Augustine, the Prioress of the Philadelphia Carmel, and Mother Elizabeth, the Sub-Prioress, saying that the Nuns were to remain in Philadelphia and that a canonical visitation would be conducted.⁹⁰

The President of the St. Joseph's Association named one of the Councilors of the Association to go with her as the treasurer-delegate for the canonical visitation, but that never happened. On Friday, April 9th, 2021, Bishop Fitzgerald phoned the President to say that the Nuns had left that morning. The President phoned the Carmel that afternoon, and Mother Pia described their departure, saying that *the Sisters approached her right after Mass today to say they were going and left in a hurry, "not properly packed" ...*⁹¹ In the same conversation, Mother Pia also said *that word is already out and people are coming to the Turn!*⁹²

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In her letter of March 23-24, 2021, Mother Pia says that the Prioress and Sub-Prioress started looking for a property ten months before this letter and that the search had ended four months before she wrote. That situates the house-hunting between May and October 2020. In her Note of February 15th, 2021, to Bishop Fitzgerald, Mother Teresa

⁸⁷ Letter from Mother Pia to Sr. Gabrielle Mary, March 23-24, 2021

⁸⁸ Email March 25th, 2021 from Sr. Mary Elizabeth, President of the SJA to the Association Council

⁸⁹ Cf. *Cor orans* # 66, which among other norms, demands that the request for a Community to transfer elsewhere be submitted to the Holy See

⁹⁰ Letter March 26th, 2021 from Archbishop Perez to Mother Teresa of St. Augustine, OCD, Prioress of the Philadelphia Carmel. Also Account of the Meeting with Bishop Fitzgerald March 26, 2021

⁹¹ Email April 9th, 2021 to Bishop Fitzgerald et aliis from Sr. Mary Elizabeth, President of the SJA

⁹² Ibid.

writes that they had been considering moving for two years, that is, since the beginning of 2019. In Sr. Gabrielle Mary's Summary of the meeting with Mother Teresa and Mother Elizabeth on September 16, 2019, Sr. Gabrielle Mary writes that Mother Teresa said that they wanted to leave even before the shooting. It is not known which shooting is meant, but there was a notable shooting incident, with a 7-hour standoff, in North Philadelphia on August 14th 2019, a fifteen-minute drive from the Monastery.⁹³ So the idea of moving seems to have occurred during the spring. Throughout the spring of 2019, Mother Teresa was writing letters to get the change in the Constitutions confirmed, and to begin the renovations of the Monastery. This indicates the intention to remain in the Oak Lane Monastery, but in September she discusses the question of relocation with Sr. Gabrielle Mary.

As to the question of membership in the St. Joseph Association, Mother Teresa had heard in November 2018 that they were to remain in the St. Joseph Association, but she was in correspondence with the President of the Santa Teresa Association to get this changed. These steps, along with the name change of the Monastery, indicate an intention to remain at Oak Lane for the foreseeable future. It is only in the meeting of September 16, 2019, with Sr. Gabrielle Mary that there is mention of moving.

In January 2020, Mother Teresa received the note from the Congregation that their request to transfer to the Santa Teresa Association had been refused. In May 2020, when they began house-hunting, they were still trying to get the Constitutions changed to the 1990 text. This was finally approved in June.

In October, when Mother Pia says that they stopped looking for houses, they also were experiencing difficulty in finding a permanent chaplain.

In January 2021, Mother Pia is told that the Nuns are considering leaving the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and in March, she is told that they intend to return to Valparaiso. It is not easy to find a consistent thread of thought among the various statements which we have considered. Consistency does not seem to be a primary consideration except when it concerns the 1990 Constitutions and departure from the St. Joseph's Association. The nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg in solemn vows chose to make a definitive transfer to Philadelphia before they ever experienced living there. This sounds like a decision to hold consistently to a definite course. Yet after arriving in Philadelphia in July 2017 they are already thinking of leaving in the beginning of 2019, 18 months after their arrival. At the same time that they begin thinking about moving, they undertake extensive renovations to the tune of nearly half a million dollars.

⁹³ <https://www.inquirer.com/news/pennsylvania/police-officers-shot-north-philadelphia-20190814.html>

Mother Teresa wrote to Bishop Fitzgerald on February 15, 2021, that they were discerning the option of returning to their original monastery and of suppressing the Philadelphia Carmel.⁹⁴ However, there is no indication that she took any steps toward closing the monastery and arranging for its suppression. Mother Pia wrote to Sr. Gabrielle Mary that on March 24th, 2021, the Prioress and Sub-Prioress arranged to transfer financial authority from themselves to Mother Pia, and that they are trying to do the same for the Corporation.⁹⁵ This would free the Nuns from Valparaiso of financial and legal authority.

In a letter dated April 11th, 2021 – that is, after their departure – the 9 solemnly professed Nuns wrote to Archbishop Perez resigning from *all corporate and other offices associated with the Carmel of Philadelphia, effective April 9, 2021*.⁹⁶ However, all this does is complicate any effort for suppressing the Monastery for it is an attempt to dissolve the Community without taking the prescribed steps. Mother Teresa also wrote to Bishop Fitzgerald expressing her hope that they may meet with a canon lawyer who is helping them, *to help clarify any canonical and practical details of the move*.⁹⁷

Since all but one member of the Community in Philadelphia left the Philadelphia Carmel and went to Valparaiso, they effectually transferred the Community to Valparaiso, for any possibility of Carmelite community life ceased to exist in Philadelphia after the morning of April 9th, 2021. One nun does not constitute a community. Moreover, even though Mother Teresa signed a so-called Letter of Resignation, this did not make Mother Pia a Prioress. Therefore, since the departure of the Nuns to Valparaiso constituted the transfer of a community, this action was governed by *Cor orans* which establishes the norms for a transfer:

65. *By transfer we mean the translocation of a monastic community from its own location to another for a just cause, without modifying the juridical status of the monastery, the composition of the community, and the holders of the various offices.*

66. *To perform the transference, it is necessary to:*

- Obtain a decision of the monastery conventual Chapter by a two-thirds majority of the votes;

- Advise in a convenient time the Bishop in whose diocese the monastery that will be left is located;

⁹⁴ Note February 15, 2021

⁹⁵ Letter from Mother Pia to Sr. Gabrielle Mary March 23, 2021

⁹⁶ Letter April 11th, 2021 to Archbishop Perez. Letter is written on stationery with the letterhead of the Carmel of Valparaiso.

⁹⁷ See above.

- *Obtain the prior written consent of the Bishop of the diocese where the community of nuns is transferring;*
- *Submit the request for transfer to the Holy See, engaging in the conveyance of assets owned by the monastery community, in accord with the canonical and civil norms on the matter.*⁹⁸

Let us consider these different steps. In a letter dated March 23-24, 2019 Mother Pia describes the Chapter vote,⁹⁹ which, however, is not a vote to transfer the monastic community, but a series of votes to transfer the individual nuns.¹⁰⁰ There doesn't seem to be any record of this Chapter Vote.

For the second step, on March 5th, Mother Teresa emails Bishop Fitzgerald and Sr. Gabrielle Mary *about the difficult decision to which we have come to return to our Carmel in Valparaiso. It is with heavy heart that we have discerned to leave this wonderful Archdiocese which has been so good to us.*¹⁰¹ This seems to be the only indication sent to a Bishop that they intend to leave. It is not an official statement. There is no mention of any Chapter Vote.

For the "prior written consent" of the Bishop of Lincoln, there is a letter dated April 8, 2021, from Bishop Conley welcoming the nuns back to his diocese. It was dated before the nuns' departure, and there is no indication of when it was sent.¹⁰²

Finally, In the case of the departure from the Philadelphia Carmel, nothing was submitted to the Holy See and there was no conveyance of the assets of the Monastery. The only financial change was that authority to transact business was transferred to Mother Pia.

Aside from any legal irregularities involved in this situation, it is noteworthy that whoever advised the Nuns in the canonical aspect of their departure, was obviously not acting according to the norms of *Cor orans*. Unless it happened that *Cor orans* was not considered to apply to this Community since Mother Teresa had told Mother Pia that *There are requirements in Cor Orans that the nuns do not like and which the Association is trying to fulfill. In Nebraska the nuns hope to request exemption from certain points of the Cor Orans document.*

One outstanding trait of the whole situation is the absence of a sense of responsibility. The Nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg made a commitment without any experience of the situation. Once in the situation, they tried to adapt the situation to their

⁹⁸ *Cor orans* Nos. 65 & 66

⁹⁹ Letter from Mother Pia to Sr. Gabrielle Mary, March 23-24-2021

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Mother Pia to Sr. Gabrielle Mary March 23-24, 2021

¹⁰¹ Email from Mother Teresa to Bishop Fitzgerald and Sr. Gabrielle Mary, March 5, 2021

¹⁰² Letter from Bishop Conley to Mother Teresa of St. Augustine April 8, 2021

preferences and at the same time they were seeking to go elsewhere. They claimed that they were autonomous, though none of them had any experience of leadership of an autonomous monastery, and Mother Teresa admitted at the end that she was *in regular communication [with Valparaiso] regarding questions, how to do this, what to do, etc.*¹⁰³ Sr. Gabrielle Mary put it very well when she said that the nuns from Valparaiso and Elysburg were like those spoken of by St. Paul: *only ready for milk and not solid food!*¹⁰⁴

The question came up about Mother Pia and the departure to Valparaiso. In her letter to Sr. Gabrielle Mary of March 23-24, 2021, Mother Pia wrote: *Yesterday, March 22, the Sub-Prioress from Valparaiso arrived here with a companion. Our Prioress, Mother Teresa, requested that she, Mother Agnes, come to oversee things so that withdraw and its documents would be done properly. When I asked Mother Agnes whether there might be some sisters hem [sic] who would be willing to assist me here for a while she later made reply that there were not. Their nuns want to stay together.*¹⁰⁵ Mother Pia states that *Their departure next month will leave me the sole occupant of the monastery with the possible work of closure.*¹⁰⁶ Mother Pia described the voting: *The nuns voted for each individual sister to be transferred to Valparaiso Carmel. Papers had previously been given to each sister to sign saying that she was transferring of her own free will. Twelve*



*ballots were taken. All had eleven votes in favor of the transfer and one negative.*¹⁰⁷ It seems obvious that the negative votes, against the move to Valparaiso, were Mother Pia's own. And yet at the Visitation of Fr. O'Donnell in 2016, she had indicated her preference to transfer to Elysburg or Valparaiso rather than live with Carmelites *from another culture or country.*¹⁰⁸

One aspect of the situation which does not seem ever to have occurred to the Valparaiso nuns is the effect that their departure would have on the spiritual life of Mother Pia. By leaving her alone in the Monastery, without a Community, they were in effect making it impossible for her to live her vocation as a Carmelite Nun.

¹⁰³ Email from Sr. Gabrielle Mary to Bishop Fitzgerald, March 4, 2021

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Mother Pia to Sr. Gabrielle Mary March 23-24, 2021

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Visitation Report from Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, April 5, 2016