



# Together we shall sing God's praises . . .

A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING FOR THE LEGACY BEQUEATHED BY  
CORNELIA CONNELLY

"Cultivate a Spirit of Thanksgiving." Words of CC  
in Recollections of M. M. Berchmans White  
SHCJ. D77 : 11

## MISSION TO AMERICA

From England let your efforts in the cause of education reach  
America. Gregory XVI

The existence of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus was a constant sign of Cornelia's hope. She went to England, a foreign country, as a convert-foundress, empty-handed and without companions, trusting that God who had commissioned her through Gregory XVI would provide the means. "The thought of not succeeding never entered our minds," said an early companion, so confident were they all. Nor did Cornelia show "the slightest doubt...that Our Lord would watch over us and send us those whom He wanted to do His work". "Pray and have great confidence in God who will take care of His own work and guide and govern it by His Holy Spirit," she said, meaning God's work within each Society member.

They arrived in Towanda, Pa. after a difficult journey by sea, rail, and mail coach. The final portion of twenty-two miles over a rutty corduroy road was rougher even than their ocean voyage had been.

Seemingly the Towanda foundation was a failure. It lasted only two years. And, like Laprimaudaye, when one reads the accounts of these first missionaries in America, one cannot help but ask, why did they stay? The answer probably lies not so much in Mother Connelly's determination for an American foundation at all costs (although she did want her sisters in America). The answer is more probably that every foundation, Derby, St. Leonards, London, Preston, Blackpool, had been made in poverty and sacrifice. The sisters in America accepted the trials with joy, and it would have been difficult for their sisters in England to imagine any greater difficulties than they themselves had already experienced.

She (Cornelia) was willing to trust the small community to accept their own mistakes and to grow. She wrote to Fr. Carter in 1863: "They must purchase their experience before they can quite possess much of it." She never doubted their ability to succeed. Her whole system of education and training was built on trust and respect for the individual. What was frequently condemned about her and about these SHCJ missionaries in America was their "independent spirit."

With regard to your good sisters at Towanda, they have no doubt many difficulties to encounter but they deserve great praise for their perseverance and zeal. (Carter to C.C.)

That they did not fail completely can be seen when one considers the friends they made: Fr. Carter, Bp Wood, Fr. Patrick Toner, the parish priest of Towanda who succeeded Fr. Celso, and from the letters of their students, written many years after Towanda was closed, relating their joy which they had experienced in the convent school, the resultant conversions, and the firm grounding of the faith in Towanda. Looking back, one of their former pupils wrote, "The Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus have their crown hereafter, that they showed the Catholics of Towanda how to rise above their environment."

Hardships continued at Towanda, and, although of a different nature, they were also the rule at the Assumption in Philadelphia. The sisters were overworked, and when one of the more recent arrivals at Towanda, Sr. Stanislaus Gray, died of consumption on the 1st of January 1864, Mother Antonia, the principal of the Assumption parish school, had to go to Towanda to replace her. At this point Fr. Carter wrote to Cornelia depicting the true state of the abject poverty of Towanda and the sufferings endured there, "well worthy of the Christians at the first ages of the Church."

Fr. Carter, however, was aware of three facts after his brief journey with Mothers ~~X~~avier and Ignatia to Towanda: 1) the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus had been trained by Mother Connelly to act with maturity. They were well-educated, well-trained, "the right Sisters in the right place," zealous and courageous.

But the American mission manifested and developed something more. The zeal, courage, fortitude and sacrifice of the sisters who made this foundation in the midst of great physical hardships, showed that the Society was indeed graced with a universal "missionary" character to go without counting the cost - "wherever the greater services of God and the good of souls demanded".