

**Address given by Sister Ellen Maroney, IHM
President
Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of IHM
Installation Liturgy, IHM Center Chapel
June 29, 2014**

Thank you:

Members of previous Leadership Teams/Sisters of St. Casimir Leadership Team –
The song we sang, *“Standing on the Shoulders”* is very true, and it’s not only about the shoulders of these women, but also about their hands, head, and heart as well; deep gratitude and thanks for their wisdom, courage, and deep trust in God. They are the reason we stand here today.

I especially want to thank Terry and Chris; there are no words to adequately thank these two women for their tireless work on our behalf, their strength in the difficult times and their unflinching belief that all will be well – and it was, largely due to their efforts. Terry and Chris, please stand again and receive our thanks.

I want to thank and welcome our brother priests: my own brother, Frank (he’s 5 minutes older, but I’m better); Monsignor John Sempa; Monsignor Larry Tressler (congratulations to our new superintendent of Catholic schools in the Scranton diocese); Father Mike Bryant; Father John Kilpatrick; Monsignor Msgr. Tom Banick; and Father Bill Blake: friends and true partners with us, especially those who celebrate daily liturgies here at the Center with us throughout the year.

Thanks also to:

Our family members and friends who travelled to be here with us, and who, throughout the years, have been our constant supporters;

Our Associates, who remind us that our IHM mission goes beyond just ourselves; and our lay co-workers who minister with us here at the IHM Center. Our gratitude for all you do each and every day is unbounded – you make all of us so proud to work alongside of you. You make us look very good;

Sister Joan, Trish, and all these talented music ministers;

Sister Fran and all who assist with the Live Streaming; and Maria and Sister Mary Ann Adams in the Communications Office; Marianne Gambucci and Sara Thomas, who get us ready for everything; Sr. Jean Coughlin and Jon Barzensky, who deserve twenty medals for their efforts to organize the seating for our dinner and prepare the food itself;

All who helped prepare for this liturgy and this day – Sister Jean Louise and Sister Chris; Sister Celesta; Sr. Ann Marie Lynott and Sr. Ann Mary Boslett;

Mike Zayac and all our maintenance staff and the housekeeping staff who hauled, moved, and fixed whatever was needed to get ready for today;

All our Sisters here with us today: thank you for your energy and strength each and every day; I especially want to thank those sisters who live here at the Center, and who with a word, a prayer, a laugh, are always there to help and support. We really do appreciate that. You are always ready to help in any way;

Finally, a huge “welcome” to all our sisters at Our Lady of Peace, all our sisters and family and friends who are joining us via the live streaming today: “Hello and Welcome, everyone!”; to our sisters in Peru and Argentina – “*Hola y bienvenidas, a todas las hermanas.*” (that’s Spanish from an Irish tongue).

As life is action and passion, it is required of a person that she/he should share the passion and action of her/his time, at peril of being judged not to have lived. (Oliver Wendell Holmes)

The author of these words, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., never met Theresa Maxis Duchemin, though they were contemporaries during the late nineteenth century. His words, however, capture the heart and soul of Theresa’s life and legacy as foundress of our IHM Congregation. Born in Baltimore of unwed parents of mixed racial lineage, Theresa knew from early on the harsh effects of prejudice, as well as the doors that could be opened through education. She co-founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence, and was the first U.S.-born African-American to become a religious sister. She soon became the superior general of the order. In 1845, at the invitation of Father Louis Florent Gillet, a Redemptorist, Theresa left all behind and travelled to Monroe, Michigan, where she and Father Gillet founded the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

We celebrate today a continuation of the journey of faith begun by Theresa in 1845 and enriched by the vision, courage, and sacrifices of those who came after her, women who met the ever-changing needs and challenges of each age to bring us to this day, this time. These women, I believe, were mostly ordinary individuals who, because of the passion of their commitment, accomplished extraordinary things. Every four years, we IHMs assemble in Chapter, which is the highest governing body in our Congregation, to discern our future direction and to elect leadership. Our recently completed Chapter 2014 called us to examine our mission as daughters of Theresa and to respond to the needs of our own wounded world with the same courageous commitment and passion as our foremothers.

Beginning in March 2013, we embarked on a collective journey to discover what God intends for us, a journey that challenged us to embrace uncertainty and risk as we move into an unknown future. During our Chapter meetings, we chose to continue our contemplative stance from Chapter 2010, and engaged in personal and communal prayer, reflection, and meaningful dialogue together. We entered into the deep questions that give meaning to our lives and that we are willing to embrace for the sake of the common good and for the building up of the

kingdom of God in our world. A word of explanation for those of you here today who have never experienced an IHM Chapter: do not be misled by the term, “contemplative”. When over one hundred forty sisters gather together in one room, it is definitely not very quiet nor is it always smooth! It is patient work, sometimes uncomfortable and frustrating, yet always holy and rewarding. All of us can attest to the prayerful focus, honest conversations, deep listening, and profound respect for one another despite our differences that emerged during this process. It is that willingness to let go of our individual desires and agendas and to totally trust the mystery of God’s Spirit working in and through this contemplative experience that led us to a new place in our understanding of how we are to give prophetic witness to the people of our world.

We reaffirmed our deep desire to be rooted in God and the gospel for the life of our world. The source of this commitment is our prayer and contemplative stance. Joan Chittister, OSB tells us that *“Contemplation is a very dangerous activity. It not only brings us face to face with God. It brings us, as well, face to face with the world, face to face with the self. And then, of course, something must be done. Nothing stays the same once we have found the God within.”*

Together we IHMs embraced a willingness to stretch our thinking and ways of ministering, and to trust that God will lead us to enter into the deeper questions of our times, questions that cause us to consider anew how we live and carry out our mission. We have learned that it is the process of seeking out these questions, not the answers, as we once thought, that leads us into the profound mystery of God-with-us and allows us to be transformed.

I’m reminded of a story about a man taking his father on a long trip. While the son was driving them late one night, the father said, “Traveling at night always reminds me of our faith in God.” The son was puzzled, and finally asked his father what he meant. The father said, “Well, when it got dark out, you turned the headlights on, and you could see about three hundred yards ahead. So you could have said, “My lights allow me to see only about three hundred yards ahead, but beyond those three hundred yards is darkness, so we can’t go any further tonight.” But you kept driving on, and the light moved on ahead, too. That’s the way God is with us: God shows us just a little bit of the way ahead of us, and if we stop and don’t move, God cannot show us any further.”

Ours is a journey of deep faith and hope that, amidst the darkness surrounding us, God is calling forth new life, new possibilities in us and our world, if we have the courage to move ahead in faith into an unknown future. We journey forward together with the people of our world with whom we live and minister, for it is through this communal, prayerful searching that we and all of creation will be transformed in God’s light.

Our mission to respond to the injustices in our world has its origin in the biblical call of justice and it is at the root of our IHM charism. Our contemplative stance summons us not to withdraw from our world, but to enter into its joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties. We promised

each other in our Chapter that we would continue our prophetic role of being a voice for the voiceless as we seek to “serve a world crying out for justice and hungering for meaning.” Recognizing that we are disciples in a globalized world, we have pledged greater awareness of local and global justice issues and have committed our minds, hearts, and hands to stand with the victims of injustice in our world. Pope Francis recently stated that unless we, as followers of Jesus, “*spend time walking on the periphery in order to really become acquainted with the reality and life-experiences*” of the poor in our society, we “*run the risk of being abstract ideologists or fundamentalists, which is not healthy.*” Throughout our history, IHMs have spent time becoming acquainted with the realities of those who are poor, going to where the needs of God’s people are, standing with the marginalized in our society. That is our faith, and that is our call again today!

Chapter 2014 asserted the profound prophetic role of living a consecrated life through the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in today’s culture, a culture desperate for signs of hope and healing. Religious have been challenged by the pope to “*wake up the world*” by being “*real witnesses*” to a counter-cultural way of life that relies on generosity and self-forgetfulness in imitating how Jesus lived on this earth. We reflected that same desire to be witnesses when we committed ourselves to search for new and deeper ways to live our vowed life with authenticity in a world consumed by violence, greed and power. These are not easy times, for sure, but our role is clear: we cannot, and we must not, shrink from the call that is ours, to be that prophetic presence that proclaims in word and deed Jesus’ redeeming love for all.

A Japanese proverb states: “*Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.*” Our Chapter 2014 set us on a path to transform ourselves and our world, but it is not a new direction for us. It is the same dream that emboldened Theresa to travel to Michigan in 1845 and later to Pennsylvania to meet the needs of immigrants and the poor. It is the same vision that led Mother Cyril to assist Mother Maria Kaupas in beginning the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Casimir in 1907. Countless numbers of IHMs have followed that vision by establishing St. Joseph’s Center, first to care for orphans and later to meet the needs of single pregnant women and the intellectually disadvantaged; Marywood University, the first Catholic college for women in Pennsylvania; St. Joseph’s Hospital; Friends of the Poor; and so many missions, schools, and other institutions in this country, Puerto Rico for a time, and Peru. I am certain that Theresa would agree that her vision has indeed been “acted upon” with passion by her sisters.

My recounting of these accomplishments here today is not nostalgia for the past or a desire that we rest on our laurels, for I have taken to heart the statement by Ted Dunne: “*When a community has more memories than it does dreams, it is dying.*” Rather, I want to illustrate that since our founding, IHMs have always responded to the needs of their world with courage, compassion, creativity, and a hope rooted in God and the Gospel message. It is no different now. That same vision of Theresa’s impels us today as we move forward in a new collaborative

effort to establish a Nativity Miguel school in Scranton next year and to open a food pantry and soon a free clinic and other services for the underserved in Carbondale. The IHM mission continues to stretch Theresa's vision in response to new needs, and I believe our faith, our energies and our creativity are needed as much today as in our founding years, and perhaps even more.

Our world today is in crisis, to be sure. Institutions and certitudes of yesterday have weakened or unraveled totally. The news each day overwhelms us with the magnitude of human suffering caused by abuse, corruption, selfishness, and greed. Religious life itself is confronted with the realities of fewer members, loss of ministry opportunities in the institutional Church due to financial cutbacks, and the aging of current members. We can find ourselves wondering how we can continue to be signs of hope in the midst of this darkness. Clarissa Pinkola Estes wrote, *"One of the most calming and powerful actions you can do to intervene in a stormy world is to stand up and show your soul. Soul on deck shines like gold in dark times. . . Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and willing to show it. If you would help to calm the tumult, this is one of the strongest things you can do. Stand up and show your soul!"*

Sisters and friends, this is our time to show our soul to a world in need. If we let the darkness stop us, how can God's light move forward? If we let those who dismiss our values as foolish or naïve deter us, if our aging and our fewer numbers paralyze us or rob us of our passion and hope, what will become of God's dream for all of us? We know that much of what we strive for may never be gained in our lifetime, but, as Joan Chittister writes, *"We must gather strength for the distance ahead from the notion that what may not be for us can be because of us."* Theresa Maxis shared her passion and action, her soul, so that others would have a better life. Let us not do less.

I would like to close with an excerpt from a poem entitled, *"On the Pulse of Morning,"* by Maya Angelou (1993), another person who truly showed her passion and action and soul!

Lift up your eyes upon
This day breaking for you.

Give birth again
To the dream.

Women, children, men,
Take it into the palms of your hands.

Mold it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.
Lift up your hearts.

Each new hour holds new chances
For new beginnings.

Do not be wedded forever
To fear

The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.

Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage,
Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, and into
Your brother's face. . .
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.

Sisters and friends, may we each have that courage and grace to stand up and show our souls
to bring about God's dream for us and our world today and into a future that will begin with
this "good morning."