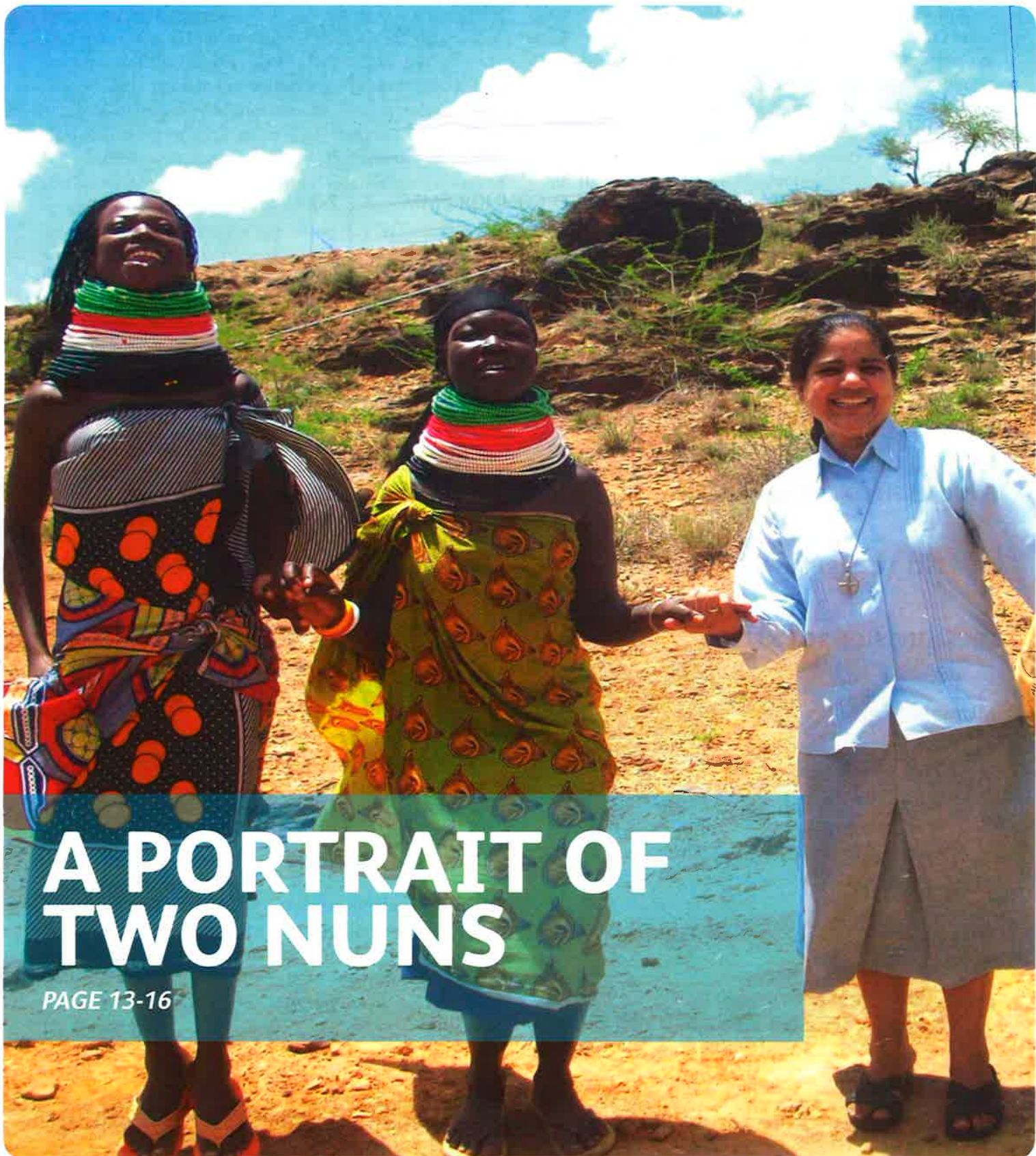


The World is Our Home

Franciscan Missionaries of Mary



A PORTRAIT OF TWO NUNS

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THE SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF SISTER MAURA O'CONNOR FMM

On March 19th 2018 Maura O'Connor celebrated the 70th anniversary of her entry into the novitiate of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. Born in the small town of Loughglynn, Co. Roscommon on March 7th 1927, Maura grew up in the shadow of Our Lady of the Angels Convent which, at that time, was the only convent of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Ireland. She attended Loughglynn Primary School and later became a boarder with the Dominican Sisters' in Cabra, Dublin.

After completing her secondary education Maura began studying for her degree at University College, Galway. God's call to follow him as a Franciscan Missionary of Mary had been echoing in Maura's heart for some time. She made the decision to put her studies on hold and to respond to that call.

After her initial formation Maura completed her studies and set sail for India. The years that followed were busy ones for Maura as she became accustomed to the sights and sounds, the colours and smells of the rich culture of the Indian sub-continent. In 1972 Maura was elected General Councillor at the General Chapter in Rome. These were years of renewal and change as the Institute responded to the call of the Second Vatican Council 'to the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our times'. The year 1984 saw, Maura O'Connor, a quiet, retiring woman from a small town in a poor part of Ireland, elected Superior General of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary which, at that time, numbered ten thousand women.

For most people the word legacy conjures up images of money, property or mementoes left by a loved one to a family member or friend in a will. Political analysts often discuss and comment on the legacies of presidents or politicians after they have come to the end of their term of office. The most important legacy, however, are not monetary and they are far more important than our own personal achievements. Each and every one of us leaves behind a legacy of the love we have shared with others, the good we have done and the beliefs we have held. These things make up our spiritual legacy, the unique and precious gift of ourselves that we leave to our loved ones. 'Spiritual legacies involve things that last forever and everyone without exception is both the receiver and giver of such legacies,' writes Daniel Taylor. He holds that a spiritual legacy is 'the unique complex of values, beliefs, insights, passions and actions that are embedded in each person's life and that can be conveyed to others.' I will now briefly consider what Maura O'Connor's spiritual legacy has been to the Institute she gave her life too seventy years ago. That legacy is contained in the letters she wrote and the addresses she made to the Sisters' of the Institute.

As Franciscan Missionaries of Mary each and every one of us is called to cultivate, treasure, secure and deepen the charism within ourselves each day of our lives. Maura believes 'that we need to be forever concerned with letting the Lord turn us around, to shape our lives according to his Word in us'. In her letters she reminds us again and again that we are called to conversion of heart. Our personal response to this call has implications not only for ourselves but its effects on us can change the entire cosmos because 'the way to world peace is each one's conversion of heart'.

Addressing the Sisters' responsible for the formation of Young Religious Maura reminds them that our willingness to offer ourselves is crucial to our way of life. She asks us to become women who are imbued with "the mind of Christ" who serve Christ without limit or reservation.

What is important is not our achievements but the offering of our lives for the sake of the kingdom. Our life 'is a life that uses us up slowly day by day, in the service of the little ones' Maura writes. Our life of service to the little ones flows from contemplation which is indispensable to our missionary life. Maura reminds us that 'contemplation too, is essential to the quality of our lives and in particular to "do" by "being" and "be" by "doing"'. Her words are echoed in Pope Francis apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* where he writes that 'we need a spirit of holiness capable of fulling both our solitude and our service, our personal life and our evangelising efforts, so that every moment can be an expression of self-sacrificing love in the Lord's eyes'.

The figure of Mary, way within the Way, permeates Maura's writings. Mary was closely associated with Maura's own vocation and she has a special place in her heart. 'The presence of Mary in our lives is one of the greatest gifts God has given us' Maura believes. As members of a religious family dedicated to Mary we are not called to launch a special devotion to Mary, nor even to imitate her or take her as a model, though all this has its place. Maura believes that, instead, we are 'to be an extension of Mary, (other Marys) in our service of the Church, fostering new life and bringing to it renewed vitality by a discrete presence'. These words are a reminder to us of how we are to live our calling to be Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in today's world. In Maura's own words every Franciscan Missionary of Mary 'deepens her love for Mary in her personal life and promotes it in her missionary work'.

The letters' and talks contained in *An Ongoing Pentecost* are the fruit of Sr. Maura O'Connor's personal reflection on our FMM way of life and how it might be lived in the world of today. They reveal her love for the Institute and her love for each one of us. Although Maura began writing these letters over thirty years ago they are 'always current because they project us into the future, these writings remain a manna which will nourish us'. They contain Maura's spiritual legacy, her unique complex of values, beliefs, insights, passions and actions that are embedded in her life and that she has passed on to us. The scope of this article has only allowed me to touch the surface of all that Maura has handed on to us. I hope it will encourage many others to delve deeper into these powerful letters and to discover for themselves the wisdom they contain.

MARY
DORNAN
FMM

*"There is only one reason
for everything we do."*

This reason is

*The heart
of Christ
beats at the heart
of all reality.*

"This is my Body given for you".

A EUCHARIST which embraces the whole world."

Maura O'Connor, fmm

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Registered Charity: England, Wales-249515:Scotland-SCO39553:Ireland-20014575

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