

## **A Plea for the Prayerful Permanent Presence of the Carmelite Nuns in our Diocese of St. Augustine**

Founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Spanish mystic and Doctor of the Church, St. Teresa of Avila, the Discalced\* Carmelite Nuns dedicate their lives to prayer and penance in quiet seclusion, purposefully withdrawn from the world and peacefully pursuing an ever closer, more intimate relationship with our Lord and Saviour. They seek to tap into God's inexhaustible mercy as they pray especially for priests and in reparation mankind's sins.

In late 1914 – with supreme irony - the Carmel of the Little Flower of Jesus in Buffalo, NY was conceived amid bloodshed and persecution as its intrepid future founding Prioress, Mother Mary Elias of the Blessed Sacrament, faced a Mexican firing squad. These Marxist revolutionaries were bent on eradicating the Catholic Faith in Mexico.

Rifles were aimed. As she knelt, anticipating certain death, Mother Elias offered a somewhat skeptical prayer to a French Carmelite whose reputation for having attained holiness by doing ordinary things with extraordinary love was spreading throughout the world: “Little Therese, *if* you are a saint, as some people say you are, then deliver us, and I promise to found a Monastery in your honor.”<sup>1</sup>

The rifles flared, disgorging their lethal barrage. The nuns slumped to the ground. But within a half hour, Mother and her Sister companion awoke, their habits bloodied and full of bullet holes, but miraculously unwounded. A mysterious man then led them out to freedom.

Thus began a circuitous journey that brought them to Cuba, New Orleans, Grand Rapids and finally to Buffalo where the Carmel of the Little Flower of Jesus was established in 1920, just as Mother Elias had promised Therese.

But now, after over one hundred fruit-filled years in Buffalo, the peaceful life of these holy women is again threatened. Their once quiet location has degenerated into a crime-ridden urban neighborhood plagued by drug trafficking, sexual immorality and increasing violence. Contrary to the requirements for cloistered monasteries, the Sisters can see – and be seen by – their neighbors on every side. They sometimes cannot sleep at night because of the raucous talking, shouting of profanities and loud disturbing music right outside their walls. Men have come up to the Sisters' windows to make inappropriate and vulgar remarks. Evidence of people making use of their property to engage in promiscuity and drug use has been found quite literally right under the windows of the Brides of Christ. Recently a knife attack and shooting took place next door, and the

mass shooting in May 2022 which made national news was just a few minutes from the Carmel. Quite a few potential candidates have been discouraged from applying to their Community after seeing the area, and the Sisters' families have expressed increasing concern for their safety.

We live in a time marked by an ever-widening cultural fissure between those who uncompromisingly pursue TRUTH and those who revel in atheistic, worldly attempts to reconstitute their version of truth. Devout young women and men are gently drawn to lifelong service to the Lord through various vocational pursuits. But sadly, for the Carmelites of Buffalo, it has become untenable to form young vocations in an environment which can no longer provide the solitude and silence which are essential for the contemplative life. Thus, Mother Teresa of Jesus, the Prioress of the Carmel of Buffalo, urgently seeks safer, more hospitable surroundings for her Community which would provide the solitude and beauty so necessary for contemplative prayer. All the Sisters are united in their discernment that, for the present well-being and future flourishing of their Community, they must relocate to a more suitable area.

After many months of prayerful supplication, the Carmelites have been led by Divine Providence to seek their new home in the Diocese of St. Augustine. Bishop Pohlmeier, sympathetic to their plight and deeply appreciative of the immense blessings which a cloistered contemplative Monastery would bring to the Diocese, has forwarded a request to the Vatican to formally transfer their Community to this area. Meanwhile Mother Teresa and Mother Miriam (the previous Prioress) have spent concentrated time under the guidance of Catherine and Kyle Hensley reviewing their real estate options and meeting many wonderful people from our Diocese. Both Mothers have encountered strong enthusiasm wherever they have gone and from whomever they have met.

We pray that these plucky nuns, filled with the Holy Spirit, will shortly, permanently, grace our community with their efficacious, prayerful presence.

**Friends of the Carmelite Nuns of North Florida, Inc.** an incorporated 501(c)3 organization, now exists. Its specific goal is to raise some **\$5 million** to acquire a well-protected home in a rural-like environment; invest in upgrades to the new monastery to ensure the physical integrity of their holy charism; move Mother Teresa of Jesus and her band of 14 holy women to this area from Buffalo; and then provide ongoing support. Checks can be mailed to **Friends of the Carmelite Nuns, P.O. Box 1012, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004.** The salutation on the check, Friends of the Carmelite Nuns is sufficient.

\* *Religious congregations of men and women, the members of which go entirely unshod or wear sandals, with or without other covering for the feet.*  
1. *Carmel of the Little Flower of Jesus: The Beautiful Garden, p. 9*