Lesson Plan on Mother Mary Walsh.

I. Introduction. One of the most urgent issues of our time is evangelization. The saints and holy people model effective evangelization methods, and one such holy woman is Mother Mary Walsh, O.P. who founded the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor in the early twentieth century in New York City. She and her sisters brought the hopeful message of the Gospel to thousands of poor families while tending the sick, cleaning their homes, caring for their children, and performing other menial tasks, all free of charge, and with great love. They were the sign of God’s love present in the filthy, crime-ridden streets of some of New York’s worst neighborhoods. And for thirty years, beginning in the late nineteenth century, they carried out this apostolate as Dominican Tertiaries.

Nursing the sick poor was the means by which Mother Mary and her sisters evangelized. They believed that in order to be successful in their apostolate (and the mission of evangelization) they had to become consecrated religious. And yet what may have been true for Mother Mary and her sisters is not necessarily true about that apostolate today. In considering her story, it may be beneficial to consider the relationship between her vocation and the apostolate and how the evangelical counsels factored towards achieving these goals. In doing so, we can sharpen our understanding of our own vocation, and the place of evangelization in our apostolates.

Mother Mary and her sisters had to overcome great obstacles to achieve their twofold goal of caring for the sick poor in their own homes and establishing a Dominican congregation. And they succeeded with some help from the parish. In the process, they had a powerful transforming influence on their parish and brought many people back to the Church or to their first knowledge of Jesus Christ. They did more than nurse bodies. They nursed souls.

II. Life of Mother Mary Walsh.

A. Mary Walsh’s Early Life, Vocation to the Third Order, and Apostolate

1. Early Life. Mary Walsh was born to Irish parents living in London in 1850, at the height of Ireland’s infamous potato famine, which ravaged the country between 1845 and 1852. Mary’s father had fled to London for work, escaping the dire situation in his native home of County Limerick, Ireland. By contrast with Mary, a year after her birth, Rose Hawthorne, (daughter of Nathaniel Hawthorne) was born in to a comfortable, wealthy home in Lenox, MA in May, 1851. Twelve years before Mary’s birth, in 1838, Mother Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Religious Sisters of Mercy, established a foundation for the poor in Limerick, Ireland under the leadership of Sister Elizabeth (nee Ann) Moore. And only a few months before Mary Walsh’s birth, the Sisters of Mercy had their hands full fighting the cholera epidemic in Limerick. They would combat this same disease again in Limerick in 1854.

Both Mary’s parents died in London of black diphtheria while she was a baby. Unfortunately, we do not know about the circumstances of their deaths. Did they die alone, unaided in their homes? Did they die in some wretched hospital for the poor? As a baby, Mary would have been unaware of these circumstances, but no doubt she would have been told about the manner of her parents’ deaths later by other family members. Her paternal grandmother travelled to London from Ireland and brought the infant back to live with her and Mary’s Aunt Hannah in Ardrine,
Knockaderry Parish, County Limerick. Depressed for centuries, the area today is again suffering from rural depopulation.

Although her aunt lived in Knockaderry parish, they attended the parish church in nearby Castlemahon, where she made her First Holy Communion and Confirmation. This would have been St. Nicholas Church, shown in the photograph here.

She attended St. Catherine’s Convent school in Newcastle West, run by the Sisters of Mercy, who gave Mary her sacramental formation. Later, she finished her formal education at the National School of Castlemahon.

A leading figure in the Church in County Limerick through Mary’s childhood was the Sister of Mercy, Mother Elizabeth Moore who was trained in the novitiate by Mother Catherine McAuley herself. Mother Elizabeth’s work was primarily in the city of Limerick. While Mary lived in the country, it would be hard to imagine that she would not have known of Mother Elizabeth and her work since she was superior of the sisters who ran Mary’s school. There are some interesting parallels in the two women’s lives which raise the question of whether Mary Walsh might have been influenced by Mother Elizabeth.

In the 1830’s Bishop Ryan had begged Mother Catherine McAuley to send sisters to Limerick because of the extreme poverty and desperate situation in the city and the surrounding areas. Mother McAuley got the new foundation going, and then after a few months she entrusted its care to the young Sister Elizabeth. In addition to serving as school teachers, they also daily served the sick poor in the hospitals (which had been converted from work houses) and the inmates in the prisons. A basic remedy they carried to the sick, following the example of Mother McAuley’s ministry to cholera victims was heated port wine, referred to as “the cure.”

One of Sr. Elizabeth’s supporters was a Fr. Matthew, called “The Apostle of Temperance.” He raised financial support for the sisters’ work in caring for the sick and poor. In turn, Mother Elizabeth proudly wore her temperance badge and promoted the movement.

Mary Walsh’s grandmother died when she was eighteen. It was around this same time in 1868, that Mother Elizabeth Moore also died. She was known for her great humility and compassion for the poor. Among the testimonies to her humility was the obedience that she showed to her Reverend Mother, whom she had instructed as a novice. Since she was so much known and loved for her charitable works, memorial masses were offered for her in parishes throughout County Limerick. We do not know what influence, if any, Mother Elizabeth and the Sisters of
Mercy may have had on the young Mary Walsh, but there seems no question that they had a very powerful influence on her surroundings.

Following the death of Mary’s Grandmother, her uncle (who had immigrated here,) went back to Ireland and offered Mary passage to the United States to live with his large family in their home near Philadelphia. Following the death of Mary’s Grandmother, her uncle (who had immigrated here,) went back to Ireland and offered Mary passage to the United States to live with his large family in their home near Philadelphia. So as a young woman she came to this country (around 1868) and stayed with her uncle for a little less than a year. But the situation was not good. His wife treated Mary like an unpaid domestic. Mary worked for them long enough to pay her passage, and realizing that the most selfless thing would be for her to move out on her own, she used her limited savings to travel to New York where she moved into an apartment in St. Vincent Ferrer’s parish in New York’s upper East side, securing a position as a laundress in a wealthy family’s home.

2. Vocation to the Third Order of St. Dominic. Shortly after moving to New York around 1870, she introduced herself to her new pastor, Fr. Michael Dominic Lilly, O. P., shown here, who became her spiritual director. He also served two terms as Provincial of the St. Joseph province. At Fr. Lilly’s suggestion, Mary began to attend the parish’s chapter of the Third Order. She worked for several different families and travelled with them in the summertime to their vacation homes where she could enjoy the country and ocean after finishing her laundry duties. Some ten years after arriving in New York, she was finally received into the Third Order around 1878.

It seems strange that such a long period of time elapsed between when Mary originally met Fr. Lilly and began attending the Third Order chapter meetings and when she was finally received. We might question what occurred during this lengthy lapse of time. Did Mary feel called to a vocation with the Sisters of Mercy, either in Ireland, or in New York? That information is not conveyed by her principle biographer, Anne Cawley Boardman. Perhaps she did, but she felt a greater obligation to help her uncle and his family. Or maybe she was attracted by the exciting prospect of moving to the New World.

When Mary first moved to New York, St. Vincent Ferrer parish used the small chapel seen to the left. But the parish expanded rapidly, as the Irish Catholic population in New York had done for fifty years prior to Mary’s arrival, growing from around fifteen thousand
members with two churches to four hundred thousand members and thirty-two churches, by the time that she moved to the city.\textsuperscript{28}

Mary was received into the Order by Fr. Lilly, in 1879, taking the name of Mary Magdalene, the patroness of the Order.\textsuperscript{29} About a year later, St. Vincent Ferrer dedicated its second church, a large, Gothic structure.\textsuperscript{30} This church building served the parish until around the time of the first World War.

After only about a year as a Tertiary, Mary believed she was called to religious life, and she asked Fr. Lilly’s opinion. He dissuaded her from entering a monastery since he perceived that she was better suited to an active life.\textsuperscript{31}

On the surface, it would have seemed logical that Mary would have applied to the Sisters of Mercy who had a house located at Houston and Mulberry streets at that time, less than four miles from St. Vincent Ferrer parish, in what is now Greenwich Village. After all, they were doing the work to which she felt called, visiting and caring for the sick poor. That was the primary reason the Sisters of Mercy had been called to New York by Archbishop Hughes, along with instructing children. This foundation, established in 1849, a year before Mary’s birth, had the threefold mission of providing a house of protection for young women, visiting and caring for the sick, and instructing poor girls.\textsuperscript{32} The congregation provided nursing sisters to serve the wounded and dying in a military hospital in Beaufort, North Carolina during the Civil War, and the nursing sisters returned to this house in New York after the war. The house was operational and establishing new foundations shortly before the time that Mary Walsh arrived there around 1869-1870.

In thanksgiving for their work as hospital sisters during the war, the Sisters of Mercy in New York were given some land at sixty-five east Eighty-first street to build an industrial home for the daughters of war veterans.\textsuperscript{33} Following the war, the focus of the Sisters of Mercy at St. Catherine’s Convent on Houston Street seems to have focused on the apostolate of educating young women,\textsuperscript{34} a primary vision of their foundress. However, they continued to visit the sick poor in the hospitals and in their homes.\textsuperscript{35} Still, over time, the apostolate of the Sisters of Mercy turned increasingly to teaching (primarily young women) and nursing in the hospitals or nursing homes and less to the care of the poor in their own homes. It was this niche which Mary Walsh would ultimately fill.

A primary difference between Mary Walsh’s vocation and that of the Sisters of Mercy was her call to contemplation, and this was something that attracted her to the Dominicans. So why did she not join a group of third order Dominican sisters? Active Dominican sisters as we know them today were developing in the United States in the early nineteenth century. The first American congregation of Dominican sisters, the Congregation of St. Catherine of Siena, was established in 1822 in St. Catherine Kentucky.\textsuperscript{36} They served in schools and the other various needs of immigrants on the frontier. Dominican sisters collaborated with the friars in various
missions throughout the Midwest and the West Coast. This was a fairly new thing in the Order for consecrated sisters in a congregation, wearing the habit outside of the cloister and doing jobs traditionally done by lay people. It was rather reluctantly allowed on the frontier because of the conditions, but not so much in the cities.

German Dominican nuns from the Holy Cross Monastery in Regensburg, Bavaria were serving the immigrants in the New York area when Mary arrived there. In 1868, they opened a hospital in Brooklyn. And in the following year, they opened a monastery and school at St. Nicholas parish in lower Manhattan. Mary may have heard of their work or even have met them, but barriers of language and culture likely would have prevented her from applying there.

There was a group of Irish Dominican nuns who also took up a semi-cloistered life in order to serve the immigrants in New Orleans. This group came from a contemplative monastery in Dublin and eventually became the Congregation of St. Mary’s of New Orleans. However, their focus was on teaching children, and that was not an apostolate to which Mary Walsh felt called.

The ecclesiastical superiors in Mary’s life seemed convinced that she was called to an active life. But she herself felt called to contemplation. Being a member of the Third Order provided a middle way for Mary and the sisters who joined her to manifest the fruits of their contemplation in the world. Considering the options around her at the time, the life of a Tertiary seemed to offer her the best means she had of living the vocation to which she felt called. This call to a contemplative life never left her.

Question One: What is a vocation?

“Thus the lay state of life has its distinctive feature in its secular character. It fulfills an ecclesial service in bearing witness and, in its own way recalling for priests, women and men religious, the significance of the earthly and temporal realities in the salvific plan of God.”

Question Two: What is a charism?
“Charism is simply the Greek word used in the New Testament for ‘favor’ or ‘gratuitous gift.’ Charisms, or spiritual gifts, are special abilities given to Christians by the Holy Spirit to enable them to be powerful channels of God’s love and redeeming presence in the world. Whether extraordinary or ordinary, charisms are to be used in charity or service to build up the Church (CCC, 2003).”

Question Three: What virtues were evident by Mary Walsh’s response to her vocation to be a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic?

Question Four: What is contemplation? Here is one definition: “That form of silent prayer in which the mind and imagination are less active, and the believer looks with love at God and the divine mysteries.”

3. Mary Walsh’s Call to the Apostolate of Nursing the Sick Poor in Their Own Homes.
One day, Mary experienced a dramatic event that changed her life forever and allowed her to discover her specific mission. On a hot summer morning in 1876, while walking to her job in a section of the city known as “Hell’s Kitchen,” she heard a cry from a small child. Little Ruthie Dunne asked her if she would come with her because her mother needed help. On entering the dark, foul-smelling, one room apartment at the top of four flights of stairs, she could hardly believe what she saw. Ruthie’s mother was lying sick on a mattress, with a dead child at her side. Her husband was nowhere to be found, and three small, hungry children peered at the stranger from the other side of the room.

This was a whole new experience for Mary Walsh. For although she had lived in poverty all her life in Ireland, before this she had never experienced the spiritual poverty of neighbors indifferent to a family in need. Without considering the consequences of her actions for her own life, she set about caring for the Dunne family until she had seen that the dead child was buried, the children were fed and cared for, the mother was nursed to health, and the father was encouraged to try to give up drinking and provide for his family.
As a result of the time that she spent with the Dunne family, Mary lost her good-paying job as a laundress, but her employer still provided money for the Dunne’s, for Mary’s sake. Mary never regretted her decision, but rather, she saw it as the sign of her mission in life. She became known as “the holy washerwoman” by the people in the neighborhood.

Question Five: What is an apostolate?
“The activity of the Christian which fulfills the apostolic nature of the whole Church by working to extend the reign of Christ to the entire world (CCC 863).”

An apostolate requires formation. Pope Paul VI writes in Apostolicam actuositatem:

Question Six: How does an apostolate differ from a vocation?
A vocation is a calling to a particular lifestyle (i.e. ordained ministry, religious, or lay (married or single). A vocation is normally for life or until the death of a spouse. An apostolate is a particular work or activity that a person performs for the sake of the Kingdom. It could be for a temporary time.

Question Seven: What charisms were required for Mary Walsh to provide for the Dunne family and to begin caring for the sick poor in their own homes?

4. Collaboration with the Clergy. Throughout her life, Mary Walsh’s vocation and apostolate involved collaboration with the clergy. It was through these priests that she learned God’s will and direction. Like St. Catherine of Siena who resolved to obey her Friar Director of the Mantellate, Mary was obedient to her Dominican superiors and the pastors of her parish through her whole life. Her collaboration with her pastors illustrates the ideal promoted by Pope Paul VI in his Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: “The laity should accustom themselves to working in the parish in union with their priests, bringing to the Church
community their own and the world’s problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which they should examine and resolve by deliberating in common.”

Also: “Indeed, union with those whom the Holy Spirit has assigned to rule His Church (cf. Acts 20:28) is an essential element of the Christian apostolate.”

B. The Roots of the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor.
1. Beginning of Community Life. In 1878, Mary met another Tertiary, Katie Barrett (pseudonym) who shared her vision of caring for the sick poor. After discussing their plans for some time to serve the sick poor while striving to build a religious congregation, they eventually moved into a house in the Dominican Parish where they could carry out the work, and it was there that they began their apostolate of serving the sick poor in their own homes, while supporting themselves as laundresses. They adopted a simple black dress as members of the Order of Penance (which somewhat resembles the habit of the Sisters of Mercy), along with a simple head covering. While many people recommended that she and her sisters not wear a habit since they believed that it would prevent them from access to many homes, Mary insisted that they did. This is interesting because Mother Catherine McAuley and Sr. Elizabeth Moore decided to have their postulants wear the habit before taking vows because the people in Limerick would not accept them otherwise.

They maintained as regular a life as they could while living in the world.

…they arose daily at five in the morning and attended three Masses in Succession, receiving Holy Communion at the first and making their meditation at the two following. At seven they returned to their rooms for breakfast and then started immediately their day’s work in the varied roles of laundress, mendicant or benefactor.

Katie and Mary worked Monday through Wednesday at the laundry business, and spent Thursday through Sunday serving the sick in their neighborhood. They desperately needed money to support themselves and the poor, and so there was a strong temptation to work longer hours, but instead they chose severe voluntary poverty so that they could live in solidarity with the poor and share what little they had with them.

Unfortunately, the privations and physical demands of the work proved too great for Katie Barrett, and in 1881 she became seriously ill. Through a former employer and friend Sister Mary was able to arrange to take Katie to Saratoga for three months in the summer to recover. Perhaps this should have served as a sign to Sister Mary that her co-founder lacked the stamina for the regimen that she had laid out for them. But once Katie was well, they returned to New York to continue the apostolate according to the same plan as before.
St. Vincent Ferrer parish built a school in 1884 which was to be staffed by Dominican Sisters from Our Lady of the Springs convent in Columbus, OH (now part of a joint congregation known as the Dominican Sisters of Peace). These sisters were given the house where Katie and Mary were living as their convent, and so the Tertiaries had to relocate in preparation for their moving in. If the Tertiaries had been asked to consider joining this community, there is no mention of it, but then again it was not the apostolate to which they felt called, and there might have been a cultural barrier between this Irish immigrant woman, and native Americans from the “frontier.” With Fr. Lilly’s help, they began renting a flat together on the west side which the Dominican Fathers had vacated after their new rectory for St. Vincent Ferrer’s had been built.

Deeply attuned to the poor, Sister Mary was able to see beyond the needs and shortcomings of the individuals she served to recognize the unjust social conditions which contributed to their plight. The fact that she was willing to embrace serious and prolonged suffering in order to share God’s mercy with her neighbor indicates a profound degree of fortitude.

The flat that she and Katie Barrett rented was located in St. Paul the Apostle parish, run by the Paulist Fathers. While this flat may have been more financially feasible for them, it removed them from the Dominican parish. The two Tertiaries became known as “the Dominican Sisters in the Paulist parish.”

The same year that Sister Mary helped the Dunn family, 1876, the Paulist Fathers had begun construction on their new Church building. Clearly, Catholics in the United States in this time put God before self since these magnificent church buildings were erected with the sacrificial offerings of the poor who themselves lived in deplorable conditions in the tenement apartments.

It was her Paulist pastor, Fr. Russell Nevins, who sent Mary on her first official mission from the parish to serve a family in need. Fr. Nevins was a member of the clerical Third Order of St. Dominic, having been received by the Very Reverend Arthur Higgins, O. P. Consequently, when Fr. Lilly left the position of pastor at St. Vincent Ferrer’s from 1881-1885 to serve his second term as Provincial, Sister Mary and her Sisters logically turned to Fr. Nevins, their pastor and spiritual director in the Third Order as their new spiritual director. The Paulist Fathers gave the Tertiaries $5.00 a month to purchase nursing supplies.

As a result of his support of these women, the sick poor of the parish and broader community were served and the parish evangelized.
through them. The Dominicans provided a sound spirituality and simple rule for the community. Both the Dominican Friars and the Paulist Fathers were very important to the young community because Sister Mary was maligned by many of the local clergy for being an idealistic dreamer.\footnote{74}

**Question Eight:** What elements must be necessary for collaboration of members of the Lay Fraternity and pastors in other than Dominican parishes?

## 2. Communal Life as Private Tertiaries.

So, what were the obligations of Tertiaries in this time? Catholics in the U. S. in this period were seeking greater holiness and the simplicity and versatility of the Rule provided the means for achieving it. The obligations of private Tertiaries were essentially the same as those in chapters except that they did not attend the chapter meetings or participate in the Tertiaries’ version of the chapter of faults. Below are outlined the duties of a Tertiary in the mid to late nineteenth century United States, taken from *A manual for Dominican Tertiaries being the Rule and life of the Third Order of St. Dominic.*\footnote{75}

**Habit:**

1. Modest dress
2. Wearing the small white wool scapular under their outer garments, and optionally wearing the leather girdle.

**Penance:**

1. Avoiding worldly amusements, especially the theatre
2. Observing the fast days, including every Friday of the year, every weekday in Advent, and the Monday and Tuesday before Ash Wednesday
3. Abstaining from meat on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.
4. Rising to praise God at Matins on Sundays and Festivals from All Saints Day until Easter Sunday.

**Prayer:**

1. Praying either the “office of Patres and Aves” outlined below, or saying the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
   The Office of Patres and Aves consisted in:
   “For *Matins*, the Creed, and twenty-eight Our Fathers and Hail Mary’s. For *Prime*, the Creed, and seven Our Fathers and Hail Mary’s each. For *Terce*, *Sext*, *None*, seven Our Fathers and Hail Mary’s each. For *Vespers*, fourteen Our Fathers and Hail Mary’s. For *Compline*, seven Our Fathers and Hail Mary’s with the Creed to conclude.”\footnote{76}
2. Prayers for the Dead:
   a. When a brother or sister in one’s chapter died, the Tertiary was obliged do say either fifty psalms of David or one hundred Our Fathers and Eternal Rests for his or her soul, and to have at least three masses said or at least receive three communions for his brother or sister.
   b. Once a year, the Tertiary was obliged to say all of the psalms of David or 500 Our Fathers, or a portion of the Office of the Dead every week, such as the portion for Vespers, etc. for the living and the dead of the whole Order

(3) Prayers before and after meals:
a. **Before meals:** say one Our Father
b. **After meals,** say one Our Father and the Miserere (*Ps 51*) or the *Laudate* psalm (*Ps 116/7*).

(4) Receiving the sacraments (confession and communion) at least four times a year during Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and on the Assumption or the Nativity of our Blessed Mother.

Precautions taken to fulfill the manner of life:
1. Keeping silence in Church
2. Showing respect to ecclesiastical superiors
3. Not leaving the city where they live without permission of their Director. Not walking about the city, but keeping in their homes. If women went out, they were to go out in two’s.
4. They were not to bear arms, except for defense of the Christian faith or another worthy cause, and then, only with the permission of the Master of the Brotherhood.
5. Tertiaries were expected to visit and care for the sick of their chapter.

The requirements of the Rule in Mary Walsh’s time call us to increased fervor in living our Rule today. Then as now, members of the Third Order did not incur a sin for failing to keep the obligations of the Rule. However, as Fr. Limerick explains, they may incur the penalty of sin otherwise. If a member does not keep a requirement of the Rule due to sloth, he or she does not incur a sin for violating the Rule. However, they would be guilty of the sin of sloth. If they fail to observe the rule out of self-indulgence, they do not incur sin for violating the Rule. But they would be guilty of the sin of self-indulgence.

From the description above of the requirements of the Rule in Sister Mary’s day, we see a possible clash between her manner of life and these expectations, specifically in the fact that women were not allowed to go out walking around the city alone, but that is precisely what they had to do to get to the sick poor in their own homes. Did this restriction bring any criticism on Sister Mary and her sister’s group by members of the Dominican Order? Possibly, but the description of walking that the manual is most likely referring to is “wander lust,” which would not have applied to the focused, determined walking that Sister Mary and her sisters did to the homes of the poor.

**Question Nine:** Sister Mary was assigned as superior of the community by the Pastor, since the community did not yet have the full approval as a congregation. If community members are living according to the Rule, why is it important to appoint a superior? Similarly, is a higher ecclesiastical superior necessary?

**Question Ten:** Is the Rule of the Lay Fraternity of St. Dominic any more or less demanding than the Rule of Tertiaries in Sister Mary’s day?

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3. **Growth of the Community.** In 1885, Bessie Finnegan and Elizabeth Vaughn joined the community, taking the names Sister Dominic and Sister Immelda. Sister Dominic Finnegan was a peaceful woman having the strength of soul
needed to endure great privations. The story is told that a few years after this period, she wore holes through her shoes which she covered with paper inserts each night. Finally, her feet were literally on the ground and she was told that she must beg for shoes for herself from a local shoe salesman. This was extremely difficult for her to do since although she had begged every day for the sake of the poor, she had never before begged for anything for herself, but under obedience to her superior, she did. 

Since their income as laundresses was insufficient to support themselves and their apostolate, they supplemented it by begging on the streets. They were recognized by the large wicker baskets they carried to hold the food and other items that they begged from the local vendors. They were truly “poor in both fact and spirit, and [had] their treasures in heaven.” Like St. Catherine of Siena who gave up her own food and clothing to the the poor, they frequently gave up their own meal to provide for the poor they served, subsisting on bread and water for days at a time and sleeping on straw pallets on the floor. For years, the sisters barely had money for coal, and on occasion had no means whatsoever to heat their rooms in the winter. Frequently, it was necessary for them to walk for miles to the homes of the poor whom they served. Despite all these physical sufferings, Sister Mary is said to have had a joyful spirit.

During these early years as the community grew, the vision of the apostolate sharpened and became distinguished from that of other religious congregations in the area. They realized that the poor had to be served in their own homes since they were afraid to go to the hospitals because people only went there to die.

Mary Walsh recognized the home was the foundational unit of society. If a sick mother were removed from her home, there was no one to care for the children and keep the family functioning. There would be no one to buy groceries, obtain medicine or run other errands. Sister Mary understood her mission to be to provide basic nursing service in the home of the poor, as well as to cook and clean the home and care for the children while the family member recuperated. In doing this, she and her sisters supported the family as the nucleus of society, which Pope John Paul II said is a main focus of the lay apostolate.

Sister Mary never accepted remuneration of any kind for her work, and she never allowed her sisters to receive payment from the families they served. The one question her sisters would ask a family before accepting an assignment was, “Can you afford to pay for the services of a nurse?” If the answer was no, then a sister would go to the house.

4. The Community Takes in Children.

As the community grew in numbers, and they were able to take on new cases, the Lord entrusted to them the challenge of caring for young children. In order to honor a dying man’s request, Sister Mary agreed to take into her care his young niece, named Mary Cepheda Napp. She later entered the community as Sister Teresa. Mary Cepheda Napp is pictured here.
Then, Sister Dominic Finnegan promised her dying, biological sister that she would care for her two daughters, and so the two girls, Rose and Kitty Carroll, came to live with the community. Consequently, from very early in her apostolate Sister Mary became responsible for rearing several young girls. This work might have helped prepare her for the later responsibility of serving as a spiritual mother.

Another important addition to the community was a single, unmarried woman named Miss Jane Prior, who had been surviving on a mere pittance. This pious and unassuming woman was dubbed “Lady Jane” by Fr. O’Callaghan. She hardly ever went out of the house except to attend daily mass. She was said to always be immaculately clean, and it was believed that she never looked into a mirror because she always asked one of the sisters if her hat was on straight. “Lady Jane” supervised the children and mended and did laundry while the sisters were out on their missions. She proved to be a silent, stalwart friend through much of Sister Mary’s apostolate. Although she never became a Dominican, Miss Prior lived with the community for twenty-five years until her death in 1910.

**Question Eleven:** What charisms were required for Sister Mary and her sisters to live the mendicant lifestyle they adopted?

**Question Twelve:** How can Dominicans today fulfill the call to mendicancy?

**Question Thirteen:** What charism might “Lady Jane” have possessed to provide the support that she did for community?

5. **The Role of Evangelization in the Apostolate.** Mother Mary was a practical Irish woman who preached the Gospel through tangible acts of love and unostentatious piety. She never lost sight of the purpose for her work. She insisted that she and her sisters were not social workers, but witnesses to Christ and his Gospel. Following the practice of Mother Mary, her sisters always left the home of a sick person with these words: “I shall return soon. Until then, I leave you in God’s care.” When the Tertiaries sensed that the people they served were open to the faith, they would leave behind religious literature or other magazines that they had previously studied carefully.

Sometimes it was necessary for Sister Mary to consult with her Pastor about the meaning of some of the readings. Other than prayer and listening to homilies and instruction in the parish, this was their primary means of study. When she or her sisters returned to the home, they would ask the family member if they had any questions about the literature that they had left, and they would then answer them.

Often, two sisters would go together to a house, and after completing their nursing duties they would pray the rosary at the person’s bedside. Their informal evangelizing led to many people either returning to the Church or being received into the Church. Still, they always saw their nursing and concrete acts of mercy as the primary means of their evangelizing.

Sister Mary was effective as an evangelist not only because of her compassion but also because of her Irish wit and humor. Her sense of humor made her welcome by the poor who needed to
be able to find joy and laugh, despite their misery. Sister Mary knew that laughter was an effective medicine. This gift also kept the community going in especially difficult times. The story is told that once when she and Sister Dominic and Mary Cepheda were penniless and had no food she cheered them up by crowing like a rooster. An angry neighbor pounded on their door and handed her a $5.00 bill and said, “take this money and get rid of that rooster.”

**Question Fourteen: What elements are necessary for an apostolate to be considered Dominican?**

6. **Serving People of All Faiths and Backgrounds.** Long before the civil rights movement or the Catholic Worker movement of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, Mary Walsh reached out to minorities in the inner city. She insisted that her sisters serve people of all cultures, ethnicities, religions, or color, recognizing that we are all one in Christ Jesus. She and her sisters won the trust and confidence of Black people in New York and elsewhere, because she truly treated them as equal to herself. Her work was considered radical at the time, but Mother Mary was undaunted by the criticisms of those who disagreed with her approach. To the contrary, she saw this as a fruitful area of the apostolate. Her work could be seen to foreshadow Pope John Paul II’s concept of **solidarity** which he says:

> …is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good, that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual because we are all really responsible for all. (qtd. Christifideles Laici 108).

Sister Mary always said that she served people of all “races.” It seems strange that the Dominicans never pointed out to her that it is a dogma of the faith that we are all descendents of Adam and Eve, that is, of one human race.

**Question Fifteen: What charism is reflected in Mother Walsh’s service to people of all religions, nationalities, and colors?**

7. **Trials Within the Community.** Not long after Mary Cepheda Napp came to live with the community, and around the time that Miss Jane Prior began living with them, Sister Mary’s co-founder, Katie Barrett became discouraged and left after eight years of faithful service. She was exhausted and discontented. She seemed to resent Mary Cepheda, and she could no longer endure the privations. She also had come to resent Sister Mary’s being her superior. If this were not bad enough, shortly after Katie left, Sister Imelda had to leave in order to care for a sick family member. But she promised that one day she would return to the community, which she later did.

This left Sister Mary with only Sister Dominic, Miss Jane Prior and the girls. Sister Mary and Sister Dominic struggled to keep the apostolate going while tending to their additional responsibilities of mothering. It probably was Sister Mary’s original intention to find a more suitable arrangement for Mary Cepheda, but the community ultimately made the decision to rear the children themselves, rather than turn them over to strangers. What they lacked in material possessions was more than compensated in the love they received in the community.
But this is not what they had planned. Even a strong person might have been tempted to try to escape such trying circumstances. One can imagine that Sister Mary and Sister Dominic may have reconsidered the question of finding other homes for the children more than once.

8. **Desire for Religious Life Returns.** It was around this time period (i.e. about ten years after she had originally approached Fr. Lilly about a vocation to religious life) and following a period of acute desolation that Sister Mary again questioned whether she was called to the monastery. It would be easy to understand how she might have felt discouraged by her growing responsibilities in the community and declining number of members. Given the failure of the community to grow and achieve stability, she may have believed that she missed her true vocation.

She confided to her confessor her desire to enter the cloistered Dominican convent at Hunt’s Point in the Bronx, and he directed her to the Prioress, Mother Mary of Jesus. This was likely the Corpus Christi Monastery, founded around 1889. The prioress (seated in center in the picture) listened sympathetically but told Mary that she was to find her calling elsewhere. Mary Walsh had a persistent desire for a contemplative life for many years. But since this calling was not confirmed, she continued the apostolate to the sick poor in her parish while attempting to build her community.

**Question Sixteen: What are signs that a vocation is valid?**

9. **The Day Nursery Experiment.** Because of the precarious nature of their lives, members of the parish suggested that the community move in with a certain Ms. Hamlin who ran a day nursery. She had gotten into debt, and it was believed that Sister Mary’s sound business sense and frugality would assist her in meeting her obligations. In turn, the day nursery seemed a more fitting place for the girls to live. With Ms. Hamlin and Miss Prior watching the children, the Tertiaries would be free to carry out the apostolate. But in time, it became apparent that Ms. Hamlin had no intention of living the Rule or in community, and Sister Mary found that the work distracted from their ability to serve their primary apostolate, so the little group of Sister Mary, Sister Dominic, Miss Jane, and the children moved out and into their own flat again, and took up again the laundry business which Sister Mary knew best.

10. **Sister Mary Opens a Commercial Laundry.** In response to the need to support the children as well as to provide more financial stability for herself and her sisters, Sister Mary rented a store on West 71st Street to run a commercial laundry. She employed ten to twelve women to bring in the laundry at this location, transport it to their flat where they washed, dried, and folded the clothes, and then returned them to their clients’ homes. This venture generated enough money to pay their bills and provide a little support for the apostolate. She and Sister Dominic (and other women who joined them for brief periods of time) carried on in this manner for several years, working at the apostolate to the extent that they could.
Marie Hanley joined the community and took the name of Sister Joseph. The community began again to build in strength.

**Question Seventeen: Adversity sometimes brings out the best in people. How might Sister Mary’s financial hardships have been related to her chosen apostolate?**

11. **Separation from Fr. Nevins.** From September, 1890 to Christmas, 1894, Fr. Nevins was assigned as Novice Master at St. Thomas College at the Catholic University of America. Then, he took a sabbatical for health reasons, due to the harsh climate on the East Coast. He travelled to the Holy Land and other places, and maintained contact with the sisters by letter. However, the Tertiaries were now a further step removed from tangible links to the Dominican Order, although there is no doubt about their fidelity in keeping the Rule. During his absence, the sisters had spiritual direction and support from the Paulist Fathers in the parish. Father Nevins’s condition gradually worsened, and in 1894 his Order transferred him to San Francisco, believing that the milder climate might be better for his health.

Unlike Fr. Nevins, his successor as Pastor at St. Paul the Apostle, Fr. Peter J. O’Callaghan, C.S.P., never became a member of the Dominican clerical Third Order, although he did make important connections with the Dominicans for the sake of the community.

12. **Limited Contact With the Dominican Order.** It is not at all clear what effort Sister Mary and her sisters made to maintain regular contact with other members of the Order after they had moved into the Paulist parish. Boardman tells us that after the time that Fr. Lilly began his second term as Provincial (in 1881), Sister Mary seems to have nearly completely lost contact with the Dominicans until 1907 when she appealed to Fr. Raymond Meagher for approval of formal affiliation of her group with the Order. Fr. Lilly served as Provincial from 1881-1885. According to one source, Fr. Lilly returned to St. Vincent Ferrer parish after his term as Provincial was up. And he lived in this same priory “almost uninterruptedly” until his death.

But for whatever reason, it appears that Sister Mary’s status became that of a private Tertiary. Private Tertiaries were very common in this time period, and perhaps there wasn’t a strong requirement for Tertiaries outside of the Dominican parish to regularly attend chapter meetings. However, the expectation was that members attend the monthly meetings if they lived within a reasonable distance from a chapter.

Attendance at the Monthly Meetings is an act of obedience to the rule. The Tertiary will therefore look upon it as a duty, and will give it precedence over all obligations that are not of a higher order. He will not therefore allow himself to be kept away, except by some reason of importance.

Even members who lived far from a chapter were encouraged to make an effort to visit the chapter at least occasionally if possible. Unfortunately, we don’t know what the conditions were like in the chapter at St. Vincent Ferrer Parish at the time or even if the chapter remained active after Fr. Lilly’s departure. Maybe there weren’t enough women for an active chapter. Men and women were at this time in separate chapters, following the ancient traditions of the Order.
But St. Vincent Ferrer is only located 1.86 miles from the parish of the Paulist Fathers, according to Mapquest, and even less a distance as the crow flies, on the other side of Central Park. They could easily have walked to the chapter meetings, that is, if they had not themselves been ill or felt that they had too many dire and pressing needs to attend to immediately around them.

Still, it is also good to keep in mind that Sister Mary and her community were still bound to other members of the Order through their daily prayers, especially the rosary and Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**Question Eighteen: What are the responsibilities of chapter members towards members who have fallen away from active participation?**

**C. Rose Hawthorne Lathrop’s Community.** Seventeen years after Sister Mary and Katie Barrett had begun their work in New York’s upper East side, in 1895 Rose Hawthorne, daughter of the famous writer, moved into a cold water flat on Water Street in the lower East side. She began to nurse cancer victims in their own homes. Also like Sister Mary, she refused any payment from the poor for her work. She wrote newspaper articles about her service to the cancerous poor, which helped with fundraising efforts for the work. Rose Hawthorne, later Mother Alphonsa, the foundress of the Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne, is a saintly person with a genuine love for the poor, but one can imagine what Sister Mary may have thought about this wealthy, former socialite coming down to rub elbows with her beloved poor. And probably, the quiet, unassuming Sister Mary would not have been that impressed with Rose Hawthorne’s attention grabbing newspaper articles about her work in the homes of the poor on the East side or her journal, *God’s Poor*. This sort of publicity would most likely have seemed distasteful to Sister Mary who was always so extremely sensitive to the feelings and privacy of the people she served.

But if that were not bad enough, possibly because of the fact that she came from a wealthy, prominent family, and possibly because she was a well educated, native citizen, whereas Sister Mary was a poor Irish immigrant with the equivalent of a high school education, Rose Hawthorne seems to have received more financial support and was put on the fast track in becoming affiliated with the Order. That support came through the Rev. Clement M. Thuente, O.P. who was assigned at St. Vincent Ferrer parish after Fr. Lilly left to serve as Provincial. Like Sister Rose, Fr. Thuente was a native citizen, and well educated, having completed his studies at the Louvain. He might not have seemed as approachable by a poor Irish laundress as Sister Mary’s beloved Fr. Lilly.

Fr. Thuente was genuinely impressed by Rose Hawthorne and the good work that she was doing. Sister Mary’s community, by contrast, seemed to be struggling, and perhaps he was not aware that it existed. Fr. Thuente used his influence to advocate for Rose and her group called “The Servants of Relief.” He urged them to become members of the Third Order of St. Dominic, and the group was allowed to be established as a separate chapter. Through his advocacy with Archbishop Corrigan, Sister Rose’s community was even allowed to wear the Dominican habit.
outside of the cloister, although Fr. Thuente himself told the Archbishop that was not the custom in this country at the time. While this is all well and good in building up the Kingdom, one might easily imagine that these privileges, if known by Sister Mary and her sisters, might be perceived as preferential treatment. They, by contrast were daily fighting for their own lives as much as the lives of the poor they served. Fr. Nevins had familiarized Archbishop Corrigan with Sister Mary’s work in 1890, but without the needed financial support, the community had not yet become stable enough to be affiliated with the Order.

But beyond these privileges, it appears that Sister Rose was granted another advantage which perhaps would have been needed more desperately by Sister Mary and her group. After Fr. Thuente suggested that they be established as a separate chapter of Tertiaries, Sister Rose wrote the following in a letter to Alice Huber, the first woman to join her in the apostolate for incurable cancer victims: “We shall be called Sisters and live in community and wear a religious dress of moderate description, and yet have much liberty and be augmented by Tertiaries living in the world.” Given that Sister Mary did not receive any financial support from the Dominican chapter, this would have been an awful lot to ask of her and her sisters, to support the wealthy Rose Hawthorne.

But perhaps these considerations are all too human. Rose Hawthorne is declared a Servant of God and is being considered for canonization. Mother Mary is unquestionably a holy and unselfish woman. Both women possessed enormous charity, and most likely they would have rejoiced at each other’s successes and joys, as though they were their own.

After a short time working in the lower East side, Sister Rose’s community relocated to a larger house in a better neighborhood on Cherry Street. After only seven years, they left the city and moved to Westchester County to establish their motherhouse and home for the incurably ill cancer victims on Rosary Hill. The property had been graciously offered to them by the French Dominican Friars in 1902. Meanwhile, Sister Mary soldiered on in the slums.

D. Trials in Sister Mary’s Community Intensify. The work of rearing children and enduring the severe privations of mendicancy and demands of the apostolate took their toll. Suffering from the cold and poor conditions, one by one community members died of tuberculosis. Tragically, the faithful, persevering Sister Dominic died of this dreaded disease in January of 1897. Her death was followed a year later by Sister Joseph’s. Sister Mary was left with only Miss Jane Prior to help care for the children and to persevere in the apostolate to the extent that they could.

Both of them developed pneumonia and had to alternately care for each other. The pattern continued with prospective members joining but finding the life too difficult and subsequently leaving for more established congregations. As the number of members rose and decreased it was necessary to relocate on several occasions. And despite their best efforts to put the needs of the children first, in 1899 young Kitty Carroll also succumbed to tuberculosis. A year later, Sister Teresa (Mary Cepha Napp) was diagnosed with spinal meningitis. A Miss O’Neill joined the community in 1900, taking the name of Sister Aloysius, but her work in the apostolate was cut short when she died of TB the following year. Sister Mary paid for all their burials at great sacrifice. Needless to say, the work of the apostolate was severely restricted.
Then, in August of 1900, Sister Mary learned of the death of her dear Fr. Dominic Lilly.\textsuperscript{141} Having lost nearly all their sisters again, Sister Mary was unable to pay the rent for the laundry store. She was forced to scale back the business and let go of most of her employees.

Faced with one serious loss after another, Sister Mary was tempted to discouragement, and she fell unconscious on the Church steps and had to be taken to the hospital. But she was able to overcome the discouragement when she heard an inner voice tell her that she still had work left to do.\textsuperscript{142}

\textbf{E. Recap.} Up until the time of this experience of her collapse and debilitating discouragement, Sister Mary’s life in the community was a roller coaster ride. Just as it appeared that the community was growing and becoming more stable, some tragedy or other would occur. Caring individuals in the parish would provide financial support for occasional crises, but other than the $5.00 per month provided by the Paulists, there was no reliable, sustaining support apart from what the Tertiaries earned through their laundry business, and this was insufficient to support themselves and meet the needs of the apostolate. Still, that $5.00 represented expectations of the parish to perform the apostolate and may have been an important psychological motivator in persevering in the work, even despite difficulties.

But the problems went beyond money. To some extent it appears that everyone in the community starting with Sister Mary as well as the spiritual directors failed to exercise appropriate discretion in regards to the degree of penance or sacrifices members of the community made. Not everyone shared Sister Mary’s super stamina developed through a lifetime of suffering and privation. One might have thought that after the first death or two, she and her spiritual director might have reevaluated the group’s manner of living. But it is important to remember that this was the harsh reality of the environment in which the immigrants lived where the specter of death was ever present.

Also, it did not help matters that Sister Mary and her sisters had drifted away from the Dominican chapter where they might have found support (both financial and spiritual) for their apostolate. The connection to the Order was tenuously maintained through Fr. Nevins, but nearly lost when he was no longer in the area.

The simple fact was that they were living more like austere religious, vowed to poverty, chastity and obedience, than they were like Tertiaries in the world. Surely, given their station in life, they exceeded a prudential exercise of voluntary poverty. Obedience also seems to have been an issue. No one would question Sister Mary’s obedience to her superiors, but the sisters under her either couldn’t handle her expectations and left, or they stayed, and died trying. But the impact on the community was that after so many years, Sister Mary was nearly back where she had started.

While the work of the apostolate was severely impacted by the lack of money, there were still many successes for which Sister Mary and the community could justifiably rejoice. These were clear signs that God was working through Sister Mary, despite her shortcomings and the terrible obstacles she had to overcome in her environment.
Gradually, the parish became more aware of the extent of the sacrifices being made by these heroic women to care for the sick poor in its geographical boundaries. And they became more involved in supporting the apostolate, but it would require a leader to get them coordinated in the effort. After the transfer of Father Nevins to San Francisco, God sent an able helper in the new pastor.

Question Nineteen: In evaluating penances, what should guide our discernment? One important consideration, according to St. Catherine of Siena, is to determine whether the penance is taken for the sake of love or for the sake of the penance, (i.e. the pride one takes in doing the penance). It certainly appears that these sisters accepted the sacrifices they did for love of Christ and of his sick poor. But their failure to take proper care of themselves negatively impacted the apostolate.

Question Twenty: What actions can we take to achieve the golden mean between an excessive rigorism and a permissive laxism with regards to penance?

III. The O’Callaghan Years.

A. Sister Mary’s Christ Figure.

After Fr. Nevins’ transfer, the new pastor, Fr. Peter J. O’Callaghan, C.S.P. took responsibility as spiritual director for Sister Mary’s community. To the right is his picture as he probably looked around the time when Sister Mary first met him. While he was not a Dominican Tertiary like Fr. Nevins, he took a deep interest in Sister Mary and Her work, and he made great efforts to support both. They became close friends, and he had greater influence on her than perhaps any other priest. Although sixteen years her junior, she always treated him with deference.

Fr. O’Callaghan could be rather severe, and this made him a good match for Sister Mary. Sister Mary Teresita described him as having, “…flashing blue eyes and a firm, strong mouth which knew no indecision.” He is said to have known Sister Mary’s soul better than anyone else. While people today might think that Fr. O’Callaghan and Sister Mary’s zeal went overboard, that would be failing to recognize that their extreme approach literally changed their parish from one of relative apathy and indifference to the suffering immediately around them, to being a vibrant, loving, Christian community and a sign of the Kingdom of God to their whole area.

Fr. O’Callaghan became the President of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America. He believed that if the Church would support the temperance movement that “poverty would be cut in half.” This belief that temperance was the key to lifting people out of poverty reminds us of the joint efforts of Fr. Matthew and Mother Elizabeth Moore, R.S.M. back in Sister Mary’s home of County Limerick. A missionary contemporary Fr. Clifford King, S.V. D., who received funs
from him when he served as Bursar for the Paulists, described Fr. O’Callaghan as, “a man of
tremendous apostolic zeal.”

For all of the gifts that Sister Mary possessed, fund raising was not among them. But Fr.
O’Callaghan was a great operational style leader and pastor who could coordinate groups of
people and bring the best out of them. He did not lose an opportunity to bring people together if
they could support the Church’s mission. In March, 1902, he established the “ Helpers of the
Sick Poor” consisting of a hundred women in the parish, to serve as lay benefactors for Sister
Mary’s apostolate. They later changed their name to “ The Friends of the Sick Poor.” This
organization developed both men’s and women’s auxiliaries who supported the work.

Because of the inspiring example of these sisters, which Fr. O’Callaghan described to
parishioners from the pulpit, he was able to recruit more women to join the community. He
networked with the businessmen in the parish and solicited their help for the sick poor. One by
one, parishioners became dedicated to the cause. Among her greatest benefactors were Mr. M. J.
Drummond who supplied coal when the sisters were out and nearly freezing, a certain Mr. “St.
Joseph” who paid their phone bill anonymously for years, and above all, Mr. J. J. Manning, who
donated his mansion on Hampton Bays to the community, paid for hundreds of poor people
to take vacations to his beach home every year, and who contributed in many other ways. This
kind and generous gentleman insisted on remaining anonymous through his life.

In 1904, Fr. O’Callaghan extended his reach to civic and business leaders outside of the parish
by familiarizing them with the community’s work in addressing notorious problems in the
community. As a result, he established the Society of the Immaculate Conception, with the
mission of financially supporting the Sister’s. The Society eventually purchased the
community’s first motherhouse.

But perhaps the greatest support that Fr. O’Callaghan provided for Sister Mary was not financial,
but ironically in reestablishing connections for her with the Dominicans. But while he quietly
established and maintained the connections, it was necessary for them both to contend with
severe problems which arose in the community.

B. Sister Mary’s Exile From the Community.
1. A Year in Seclusion in Englewood, NJ. With the joy of community also come some of the
greatest trials. St. John of the Ladder uses a metaphor to describe the trials between people in
community as shaking together stones in a jar, so that the rough edges can be worn smooth.
One of the most painful trials for Sister Mary was being rejected and misunderstood by her
sisters and her spiritual director. Nowhere was this suffering more acute than when she had to
address a serious concern about a wealthy young woman who had joined the community, taking
the name of Sister Annette (pseudonym).

Sister Annette was well educated, capable, and had a winning personality. Because of her
enthusiasm and her leadership ability, she quickly gained the respect and support of the sisters,
so much so that she was named treasurer after only two months in the community. Initially,
Sister Mary and Fr. O’Callaghan believed that Sister Annette would be a valuable asset to the
community because she was young and strong and willing to work and accept the privations of
the life. And she was very well connected, and the community greatly needed financial assistance if they were successfully going to be able to expand their services to the sick poor.

However, Sister Mary also began to notice strange behaviors on Sister Annette’s part. She would suddenly take ill with few noticeable symptoms and would go to her room, absenting herself from the community activities, saying that all she needed was rest. When she was present and active in the community, her enthusiasm was contagious. When she became ill, the whole community suffered a let-down. After one of these episodes, she asked to see her private doctor, a privilege the other sisters in the community could not afford. Sister Mary consulted Fr. O’Callaghan about this request. Somehow, both of them made the very imprudent decision of granting it, possibly because they were concerned about losing such a promising member or offending her influential family.

Boardman describes how Sister Annette gained popularity with the other sisters, somewhat at Sister Mary’s expense by calling into question some of the foundress’s practices. Sister Annette offered fresh ideas and was better educated than Sister Mary who, by contrast, was worn down by twenty-seven years of the work. Sister Mary probably saw the potential in this younger sister, and she might have realized that because of her failures in the past, she needed to change her approach in dealing with her sisters.

Sister Annette had become the de facto leader in the community and she had many important friends who could potentially be benefactors for the work. After she had been in the community for less than a year, Sister Mary unexpectedly recommended to Fr. O’Callaghan that she be assigned superior in her place. Possibly, Sister Mary was operating out of a false sense of humility, believing that she would be more humble if she relinquished the leadership to her junior. For example, Mother Elizabeth Moore, R.S.M. had been held up as a model of humility for the obedience she showed to her Reverend Mother whom she had trained in the novitiate. Or perhaps Sister Mary’s recommendation was simply a practical response to a problem that she realized could destroy the community and everything they had worked so hard to achieve. Fr. O’Callaghan was initially very unhappy about the recommendation which he believed to be imprudent. Nevertheless, he approved the assignment of Sister Annette as superior.

Unfortunately, the power went to Sister Annette’s head. She began to act condescendingly towards Sister Mary and to treat her as incompetent. Her mysterious illnesses began to last days at a time, and then she would suddenly appear back cured. Sister Mary’s lack of assertiveness, (or humility as interpreted by Boardman) might have contributed to the problem. Still, Sister Mary put the community before herself and quietly observed the new superior.

Eventually, Sister Mary suspected that Sister Annette was abusing the narcotics to which she had access. When she reported this concern to Fr. O’Callaghan he believed that she resented having recommended that Sister Annette serve as superior in her place and that she wanted the power back. He also considered that she had been under a great deal of physical and emotional stress for years. Believing that it would be in her and the community’s best interest for her to be removed from the situation for a while, Fr. O’Callaghan sent Sister Mary to Villa St. Michael’s
in Englewood, New Jersey for a minimum period of a year’s rest. He also placed her under strict orders of silence about anything related to her community.

A view of St. Michael’s Villa today on Englewood Cliffs

Possibly, Fr. O’Callaghan intended that Sister Mary use this time to interact with sisters who were performing the same or a similar apostolate, since the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace at the Villa also served the sick poor in their own homes, and their work was directed specifically to poor Irish immigrants. Or he might have even planned that if things did not work out for Sister Mary to return to her community, she might be able to join this group of like-minded women who shared her passion for serving the poor. He truly seems to have been acting in her best interest. But unfortunately, Fr. O’Callaghan’s decision was viewed as a punitive exile by Sr. Mary. But it may also have come on the recommendation of a physician.

For better or worse, Sister Mary interpreted Fr. O’Callaghan’s order of silence in the most literal sense to mean that she could not be involved in any way with the sisters at Villa St. Michael’s. It may have been advantageous for her to not become associated with this group, influenced as they were by their controversial feminist foundress, Margaret Anna Cusack, the “Nun of Kenmare.”

Unfortunately, Sister Mary’s overly strict interpretation of the gag order resulted in her failing to even mention to the sisters that her room was unheated. During this period of isolation, she suffered great loneliness and abandonment as well as serious physical sufferings from the cold. Sister Mary was known to have had a temper and she surely had to overcome inner trials to not become bitter at being exiled from her home. In this time of suffering and isolation, she immersed herself in contemplative prayer. Ironically, this practical woman who had been denied the opportunity to enter a contemplative community years before, suddenly had little to do but contemplate and join her sufferings with that of her crucified Lord.

A great consolation to her during the Englewood period was receiving regular mail from Sister Teresa and one visit from this younger sister. Fr. O’Callaghan was oblivious to Sister Mary’s sufferings because he had been reassigned to a highly desirable and prosperous parish in Chicago. However, his letters consoled her and kept her hope alive that one day she would return to her community.

Finally, after months of suffering in the cold, a parishioner friend, Mrs. Mitchell, from St. Paul’s parish back in New York, went to visit Sister Mary at St. Michael’s Villa. She was outraged over the freezing condition of Sister Mary’s room, and she informed the new pastor in the Paulist
parish, Fr. Moore, about it. Fr. Moore contacted Sister Annette, and asked her to request the sisters at Villa St. Michael to provide a heated room for Sister Mary. Normally, Sister Annette made all communications with the Villa through Sister Teresa, but in this one isolated case, she contacted the superior at Villa St. Michael herself and said that Sister Mary had complained that her room was unheated. The superior was understandably upset that Sister Mary had not said anything to her, and Sister Mary was deeply hurt by the misunderstanding since she had not complained to anyone. However, after this incident, Sister Mary was invited to join the sisters as often as she liked for prayer in the chapel, which she did several times a day.

But the cold, the isolation, and the inactivity had already had their effect, and Sister Mary suffered a mental and physical collapse. She had to be admitted to St. Francis Hospital in Jersey City. But while in the hospital, she began visiting the other patients, comforting them and praying for them at their bedside. It was through this work that she regained her strength and was able to return to St. Michael’s Villa. However, as a result of her time at St. Michael’s she always suffered from arthritis and her already poor eyesight grew worse.

Meanwhile, Sister Teresa’s condition also grew worse, and she was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Fr. O’Callaghan made a trip to New York and anointed her before she died, but he wasn’t able to make the trip to Englewood to visit Sister Mary. Sister Teresa’s last words to him were, “Don’t forget Sister Mary.” She died on the feast of St. Mary Magdalene, Sister Mary’s feast day. Sister Annette failed to ensure that Sister Mary was made aware of Sister Teresa’s condition, although she claimed to have sent her a letter that Sister Mary never received. And so she learned the news of Sister Teresa’s death by way of a blunt telegram.

2. Period of Exile as a Sacristan under Fr. O’Callaghan in Chicago. Realizing that her inactivity had likely contributed to her worsened condition, Fr. O’Callaghan made arrangements for Sister Mary to move to Chicago to work as sacristan in his parish, the historic St. Mary’s on Wabash Street. In September, 1904, after eleven months at Villa St. Michael, Sister Mary finally got out of there and took a train to Chicago, where she was met by Fr. O’Callaghan. This was a better arrangement for her since she at least had work to do, and she could be near someone that she knew and who knew of her work. This kept her hope alive that eventually she could return to her apostolate in her community. She never complained or mentioned anything about her community to anyone and only spoke of it with Fr. O’Callaghan throughout her two year exile in Chicago. Sister Mary served here as Sacristan.

Throughout the whole period of her exile, Sister Mary lived nearly alone and in silence. Despite the fact
that this was a period of great suffering and trial, it also provided the opportunity of grace, as she had extensive time for prayer and contemplation. This period of silence and prayer might remind us of the three years that St. Catherine of Siena spent in prayer in her family home. Mother Mary Magdalene, who later became Mother General of the Blauvelt, New York Dominican congregation, met Sister Mary while she was in Chicago. After Mother Mary’s death, Mother Mary Magdalene said that she had been struck by her deep spirituality and humility.  

C. Return and Affiliation with the Dominican Order.

1. Sister Mary Returns to Her Community as Superior. After three long, painful years, Sister Mary was vindicated when Sr. Annette’s drug abuse problem became so severe that it had to be addressed. Sister Mary’s practical wisdom and intuition about this young sister had been proven correct. When the sisters in her community failed to act out of a false sense of compassion for her, her family stepped in and notified the ecclesiastical superiors. Sister Annette was sent away from the community in the fall of 1906 for her drug induced psychosis. The sisters immediately petitioned Fr. O’Callaghan for Sister Mary’s return as their superior. After six months of treatment, Sister Annette was discharged from St. Vincent’s Retreat in New York and she is said to have lived an exemplary Christian life for her remaining twenty-five years.

During her lengthy period of exile, the community benefited from several positive administrative changes made by Sister Annette, including incorporating the community as a charitable body, giving it legal status and protection. And Sister Annette gained several important life-long benefactors for the community, including the greatest benefactor of all, Mr. Manning, who continued to support the community after Sr. Annette left. And so Sister Mary’s and Fr. O’Callaghan’s hopes that this wealthy young woman would provide benefactors was answered, although Sister Mary paid a great price in suffering for it.

Fr. O’Callaghan proved to be Sister Mary’s true friend, despite his severity. He helped her ride out the storm and provided for her in the interim. In her turn, Sister Mary’s obedience to her spiritual director was exemplary. Both of their actions ultimately resulted in peace for Sister Mary and her community.

Why did God allow this suffering in Sister Mary’s life? Regardless the reason, the result was a period of purgation that would have challenged a saint, to forgive her sisters and to move back into the community. This would have been especially difficult since the people that she was closest to (Sister Teresa and Miss Jane Prior) had died in her absence. But maybe it was necessary that all of these friendships or worldly connections be stripped from her before she could devote herself completely to Christ as a religious.

Question Twenty-One: What charism enabled Mother Mary to persevere despite her many losses?

2. Approval of the community finally comes from the Dominican Order. Mother Mary Walsh desired that her community be an approved, professed congregation of consecrated religious in the Dominican Order, so that it would have the stability to continue the work long after her death. Actually, Boardman implies that her main objective was to attain Ecclesiastical
approval with any one of the established orders, although her preference would have been the Dominicans. 196

Determinedly, she set about what must have appeared to even the most sanguine as an exceedingly difficult undertaking. She knew that the Church is slow to sanction new religious congregations unless they show real promise of growth and stability. Yet, Sister Mary realized that to accomplish that growth and stability her group must become a recognized part of some one of the old Orders and it was natural that she should turn to the Dominicans since she and all her Sisters were Dominican Tertiaries.

3. But was she sufficiently “Dominican”? Based on that description, it certainly sounds as if her vision of her own community and its long-term stability came first and the Dominican order second. Most of the Dominican sisters in the city were either cloistered or were involved in teaching. Serving the sick poor did not seem like a Dominican apostolate. This was not an uncommon opinion, but it doesn’t seem to square with the work of women in Dominican history.

Sister Mary’s service to the sick poor follows a pattern of other holy Dominican women before her. St. Catherine of Siena nursed the sick poor in the Casa della Misericordia and the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, and she nursed the plague victims and buried them with her own hands. 197 Mary Walsh’s work was also very like that of Blessed Marie Poussepin who dedicated herself to the service of the sick poor in eighteenth century France. And it was preceded by that of Marie-Pauline Jaricot of Lyons who served the poor in the hospitals in the early part of the nineteenth century before applying her talents to supporting the missions. 198 And it is along the same vein as her immediate predecessor and contemporary in France, Thérèse Dominique Farré who established the Dominican Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary to care for the Sick in Bourg. 199

After she was received back into the community, Fr. O’Callaghan suggested that she visit the prior of St. Vincent Ferrer’s priory, Fr. Raymond Meagher, to ask for approval of her community in the Order. Boardman writes, “She knew that many years and almost complete absence of any Dominican influences separated the summer of 1881 when Father Lilly had been elected Provincial of St. Joseph’s and this wintry day so soon after her return from Chicago.” 200 Fr. Raymond Meagher, who encouraged Sister Mary to contact the Master General of the Order is pictured to the right. 201

Despite Sister Mary’s own inexplicable estrangement from the Dominican Order, Fr. O’Callaghan, always looking out for her interest, had a chance encounter with an influential young Dominican priest while waiting on a train platform in Zanesville, OH, and he took the opportunity to acquaint him with Sister Mary’s work and to ask for his support for her. 202 The chance encounter proved providential. The young priest was none other than the Rev. John T. McNicholas, O.P. who at the time was serving as novice master at the
Dominican House of Studies that had recently opened in Washington, D.C. He later became Archbishop of Cincinnati. To the left is a picture of the Most Rev. John T. McNicholas, O. P.203

According to Mr. John I. McGiver, Sister Mary appealed directly to the Pope, over the head of the “Procurator General of the Dominican Order” for approval of her community, and it was only then that they became known as the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor.”204 Besides the fact that bypassing her ecclesiastical superiors would have been completely out of character for Mary Walsh, this claim overlooks the fact that all the members of the community already were Dominicans. Boardman explains that Sister Mary wrote to the Master General of the Order, Fr. Hyacinth Cormier, O. P., at the recommendation of Fr. Meagher, the Prior of the Dominican Priory at St. Vincent Ferrer parish in New York.205 Fr. Cormier gave her a judicious response, suggesting that she obtain the recommendation of her Prior Provincial. Consequently, Sister Mary travelled to Washington, D.C. to petition Fr. John T. McNicholas, O. P. who obtained consent from the Archbishop of New York.206

But it would not be so easy to obtain the consent of the Master General of the Order. Fr. Cormier had planned a trip to the United States in the summer of 1909, but sickness prevented him from making it, and so he sent in his place his Procurator General, the Very Reverend Henry Desqueros, O. P. When presented with the petition to approve affiliation of their group, Fr. Desqueros responded that the community should either disband, or she should apply to affiliate with a different order because the work she was doing was not compatible with the Dominican charism.207 According to Boardman, Fr. McNicholas then appealed the case directly to the Master General, with recommendations from the Very Reverend Raymond Meagher, O. P., and the Provincial, the Very Reverend L. F. Kearney, O. P.208 Fr. Cormier replied promptly granting approval for affiliation and permission to wear the white Dominican habit.209

The community was officially received into the Dominican Order as the American Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor of the Immaculate Conception on the feast of St. Dominic, August 4, 1910, by the Very Reverend Hyacinth Cormier, O. P., Master General of the Dominican Order.210

4. The Novitiate. After the approval for Mother Mary’s congregation to affiliate with the Dominican Order, Sister Mary and her sponsors made several attempts to request a novice mistress from an established Dominican community, but each time some dilemma occurred preventing it. Finally, the Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs in Columbus, OH agreed to send Sr. M. Frederica, O.P. to serve as their novice mistress.212 And so, in her early sixties, Sister Mary began the novitiate.213

Her novice mistress was said to have been especially harsh towards Sister Mary, giving her many humiliations and penances. Sister Mary made many mistakes for which she was required to publicly ask forgiveness nearly every day.214 Frequently, she was required to make the venia,215 which meant throwing her body on the floor in prostration, begging
forgiveness for a transgression. Once, she was left “in venia” for over half an hour. Her novice mistress marveled at her humility in accepting correction.

Question Twenty-two: What specific differences exist between the Third Order regular and the Lay Fraternity of St. Dominic (Third Order, Secular)? What do these differences imply about differences in the vocation itself?

One major difference is the vows. Religious sisters make a vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience, whereas members of the Lay Fraternity promise to obey the Rule of the Lay Fraternity. However, the Rule does direct us to obedience to our superiors in the Order. Another major difference is that the Lay Fraternity includes both men and women. All people are called to be chaste, but members of the Lay Fraternity can live out their vocation in either a married or single state of life. Members of the Lay Fraternity do not take a vow of poverty, but we are encouraged to live simply, in accordance with our state in life.

5. Profession and Election as Superior. Finally, the great day came, and she made her temporary profession on September 8, 1911. She was named Prioress by Fr. McNicholas on February 12, 1912. The same year, she established a house in Columbus, OH.

6. An Unseemly Incident as Superior. Four years later, a group of sisters led by Sister Paulina Landon (pseudonym) believed that Sister Mary had too much authority and instead of approaching her about it, they went over her head to their Ecclesiastical Superior, Monsignor Edwards, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of New York, to request that they be allowed to elect a prioress. Monsignor Edwards and Fr. McNicholas conferred with Fr. O’Callaghan and the novice mistress from St. Mary’s of the Springs, Sister Frederica, who agreed that the time had come for the community to be governed more in the traditional manner, with an elected prioress.

Monsignor Edwards decided to appoint a temporary prioress, Sister Reginald, with her appointment subject to a vote of the sisters. Simultaneously, he wanted to assign Mother Mary as Mother Provincial, not subject to a consultative vote by the sisters. Boardman explains that it may have been Monsignor Edwards’ intention that Mother Mary’s assignment would anticipate the future growth of the congregation, demanding division into different provinces. However, the congregation never used geographical provinces in its government. Sadly, Sister Mary was not consulted and not even made aware of the decisions that were made before they were announced.

When it was announced it was done in an indelicate manner, and the monsignor even openly referred to Sister Mary as being too “old and nervous” for the duties of Prioress. Sister Mary became flustered, and she honestly couldn’t understand why Sister Reginald’s election as Prioress would require a consultative vote from the sisters whereas her assignment as Mother Provincial would not. And so she called for Fr. McNicholas. He explained to her that the procedure was valid since local superiors could be elected by sisters under temporary vows, but not higher superiors. But unfortunately, Sister Mary questioned Father McNicholas, who became angry with her and believed she was guilty of willful insubordination. He left the convent with the intention of resigning as their director and turning the matter over to the Cardinal to resolve.
It could have spelled the end of Sister Mary’s role as superior and possibly her vocation as a Dominican sister, had Fr. O’Callaghan not come to her rescue. He was able to smooth things over with Father McNicholas and Monsignor Edwards, assuring them it was only a misunderstanding. In effect, he turned the old and nervous argument to her advantage, explaining from his insights about her past that Sister Mary was concerned about following the proper procedures regarding leadership of the community. Father McNicholas was won over. He would later support the community again by winning for them the friendship of Mr. Albert Boardman, a wealthy New York attorney, who became one of the community’s greatest benefactors.

7. Final Profession and Election as Mother General. Sister Mary made her final profession in 1919, and in 1921, after the joy of watching her first twenty-two sisters make final profession, she was unanimously elected Mother General. A picture of her with this new title of Mother Mary is shown below.

D. Towards Perfection in Humility.
1. Slandered by Her Co-Foundress. Like St. Catherine of Siena whose reputation was slandered by the nauseous Andrea who accused her of unchastity, her former friend and co-foundress, Katie Barrett, who had left the community out of discouragement, spread lies about her saying that she mothered Mary Cepheda Napp out of wedlock. Her former associate committed this slander for revenge since her request to re-enter the community had been denied by the novice mistress, Sr. Frederica. Mother Mary remained calm and at peace, trusting in Jesus to resolve this matter. Like St. Catherine who had been calumniated by her sister in the Order of Penance, Palmerina, she prayed for Katie’s conversion. In this trial, Mother Mary acted with great wisdom and patience because she neither spoke against Katie nor became a burden to her sisters by worrying. Nor did she fall into anxiety over what she could not control. Her wisdom was a sign of her great love of God and neighbor.

Katie later repented and admitted what she said were lies, and as Mother Walsh prophetically predicted, she was nursed in her last days by Mother Mary’s spiritual daughters.

2. Reigned in by Benefactors. Although it had always been Mother Mary’s vision to serve the sick poor in their own homes, as her community became more established, she began to dream of building a free hospital for the poor. She believed that such a hospital which shared the same
moral vision as her community was needed to train the sisters in nursing skills. This dream was never realized due to the common sense virtue of her benefactors, who realized that the undertaking was beyond their reach, and they pointed out that it was not consistent with her community’s constitution to provide for the sick poor in their own homes.

3. A Humbling Tea. Mr. Boardman gave the community a beautiful large home on twenty-five acres in Hampton Bays, New Jersey, overlooking Shinnecock Bay as a vacation home. Mother Mary wanted to thank the community’s benefactors by having them over for a formal tea to celebrate the opening of this new home. She made the altar linens for the chapel and delegated to one of the sisters to purchase statues for the chapel, with money that she had raised by her needlework. The statues that came to them were apparently of a poor quality, and the sisters referred to them as “homely little saints.” Fr. O’Callaghan was among the invited guests. But he arrived the day before the scheduled tea. He toured the home and when he saw the tacky statues, he said that they couldn’t allow people to see them. He ordered Mother Mary to cancel the tea and withdraw the invitations. Although terribly embarrassing, she carried out his directive promptly and gracefully.

4. Fr. O’Callaghan opposes Mother Mary’s Election as Mother General. After moving into the home at Hampton Bays in 1921, the sisters were finally allowed to make their final profession, although Mother Mary had been allowed to do so in 1919. Archbishop Hayes presided at the election. Fr. O’Callaghan was present in the chapter room and for reasons unknown (although it may have been her age), he openly campaigned against Mother Mary as Mother General. His opposition was so blatant that Archbishop Hayes felt it necessary to ask him to leave the chapter room. Mother Mary was unanimously elected as Mother General, although she asked to be relieved from this assignment due to her age. Archbishop Hayes refused her request, and she humbly accepted the assignment. Fr. O’Callaghan’s behavior was an embarrassment to them both. The incident would have been enough to destroy most friendships, but Mother Mary and Fr. O’Callaghan shared a spiritual friendship that was strong enough to bear even this transgression.

E. Mother Mary Goes to her Reward. After having established several houses in the New York area, and in Columbus, by 1922 Mother Mary was planning the establishment of a new house for her sisters to serve the sick poor in Denver. Worn out by a trip to Ohio and fearing her failing heart, she made a visit to the home at Hampton Bays. There, she suffered a heart attack, and surrounded by her sisters singing the Salve Regina, she died two days later on November 6, 1922.

Her funeral in New York city was attended by many of her beloved poor. One of her close followers said, “Until I knew her, I never met any person who really loved his neighbor.” However, Mother Mary’s love of neighbor was always primarily motivated by her love for Christ.

Fr. Thomas Schwertner points out a major contribution of Mary Walsh’s life: “The death of Mother Mary Walsh, on November 8, 1922, removed from the American Church a woman who by her example of Catholic charity did more to counter-act the errors of philanthropists and professional social reformers than could a library of apologetical works.”
She was buried in Calvary Cemetery in New York, but in November, 1958, her remains were removed to the Mother house which had been relocated to Ossining, New York.  

With money that they saved by sacrificing their bus money and walking for miles to their patient’s homes, the sisters made a contribution to building the new Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., and they purchased a memorial stone for Mother Mary, which is shown below. Notice which word was selected to be shrunk in order to fit all the letters on the stone. It is located to the left around the corner as one walks from the shrine office towards the crypt Church. Make a hard left just past the sign hanging down from the ceiling. It is the second up from the bottom. Fittingly, her memorial stone faces that of Mother Catherine McAuley, and her Sisters of Mercy on the pillar across from her stone.  

**Question Twenty-Three:** Sherry Weddell implies that Catholics do not have a conscious goal of living as “intentional disciples.” What aspects of Weddell’s intentional discipleship are strengths or weaknesses in Mary Walsh’s witness?  

V. The Community after Mother Mary’s Death.  

According to Fr. Schwertner, at the time of Mother Mary’s death there were almost fifty women in the community. They had established a house in St. Catherine of Siena’s parish on New York’s east side, and they had houses in Columbus, OH and were in the process of establishing a new house in Denver, CO. In 1930, all of the sisters were sent to a hospital for formal nursing training before beginning the apostolate.  

By 1951, the congregation had established houses in Springfield, Illinois, Dayton and Cincinnati, Ohio, Detroit, and Minneapolis, and had a new motherhouse on the Hudson river in Ossining, New York.  

The community went through various versions of the habit. Eventually, they adopted the unique heart-shaped coif, for which they became known after Mother Mary’s death.  

The community’s membership has steadily declined since Vatican II, until today there are only a handful of elderly sisters remaining.  

A certain Sister Gemma is attempting to renew the original work begun by Mother Mary with a new religious foundation called the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor of the Immaculate Conception and Lucy the Martyr, although the community seems to be having trouble getting established, but then, so did Mother Mary’s community.
In 1995 three Dominican communities came together to form the Dominican Sisters of Hope. These communities included the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor of Ossining, New York (who trace their roots to Mother Mary), the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena of Fall River, MA, and the Dominican Sisters of Newburgh, New York. The other two communities sold their Mother houses, and the former Mother House of the Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor in Ossining was renamed the Center for Hope.

2. Old and New Directions in the Apostolate. None of the remaining sisters of the former Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor currently work in the original apostolate of serving the sick poor in their own homes. A partial listing of the ministries of the Dominican Sisters of Hope includes: “social services, community organizing and the arts,” “health care,” “education,” and “spiritual development.” All of these things are good in and of themselves. However, the original argument of Mother Mary was that they needed to establish a religious congregation in order to ensure that their apostolate to the sick poor would continue. But it appears that the sisters in the original community are no longer able to perform the apostolate, and it is not a focus of the Dominican Sisters of Hope either.

But the apostolate of Mother Mary is still being performed, as a member of their leadership team describes: “…the Dominican Sisters Family Health Service, which was started by Mother Mary Walsh, is still on this property. Lay people administer the services to the home bound in the surrounding area.”

Affiliated with this group is the Dominican Sisters Home Health Agency of Denver, Inc., which traces its roots back to the congregation there of Dominican Sisters of the Sick Poor founded in 1923. Mother Mary Walsh died while planning the opening of this Denver house. Like the agency on the property at the Center of Hope, it is run by lay people, with one elderly sister in residence. Following is a description of their mission, which is very close to the original vision of the foundress:

The Dominican Sisters Home Health Agency's mission is to provide free, in-home and community-based nursing care, case management and related health services to the poor, sick and elderly who are uninsured or underinsured and without other resources, so they are able to stay safe, healthy and independent in their own homes - delaying or avoiding nursing home placement. The agency provides in-home nursing care and services as well as free loans of durable medical equipment for the community, regardless of age, race, creed or ethnicity.

According to the community’s management page, they have a full-time staff of fifteen people, five part-time employees and one hundred and fifty lay volunteers.

So the apostolate has come nearly full circle. They started as lay volunteers and Tertiaries; then they became partially financially supported by their parish. Then, they became fully financially supported professed religious. And now the work is once again being done by lay volunteers. In the process of becoming institutionalized and then reorganized as a lay institution, the health care
industry has dramatically changed as well. But it is still the uninsured and underinsured to whom they minister.

**Question Twenty-Four: Does an apostolate depend upon a community? Does a Catholic community depend upon performing an apostolate?**

**3. Impact on the Parish.** Caring for the sick poor is an apostolate that could be performed by either lay or religious people. But what is the potential impact on the parish if the apostolate is carried out by religious as compared to lay people? Sister Mary’s community had difficulty getting established until it was financially supported by members of the parish. But in becoming a religious congregation, it was no longer directly under the control of the parish. Religious communities may grow or decline but not necessarily in sync with the needs of the parish. But if the work is done by a religious Order, then the parish does not have to rely on local talent or vocations from within the congregation.

**IV. Conclusion.** Mother Mary Walsh’s life provides us with a great model of perseverance and hope in carrying out her apostolate, despite incredible discouragement and humiliations. She shows us the benefits of positive collaboration between members of the laity and the clergy. Yet, for years the community struggled in part because the Tertiaries were striving to live the evangelical counsels, but their Rule did not address these concerns. Unregulated by a Rule or Constitution that addressed the religious vows they seemed to be striving to live, they their life and apostolate lacked proper balance. Had they stuck only to the requirements of the Rule for Tertiaries, they may have been able to sustain members longer, and the work of the apostolate would likely have been more consistent. Yet, it was their zeal in striving after the evangelical counsels which inspired parishioners to lend their financial support of the community. Their solidarity with the poor made them loved and trusted among them.

The apostolate began to flourish when it was embraced by the parish led by the pastor. A life of severe voluntary poverty, no matter how noble, is incompatible with providing for the expenses of healthcare services. Then too, there is the issue of how they were providing these services – to the poor in their own homes. It is a credit to the congregation that they succeeded for several generations in doing this work. But the environment in which they worked is more appropriate for the secular character of the lay vocation. Perhaps that is one reason that it is once again being carried out by laypeople today. In Sister Mary’s day, there was an advantage to being religious, and people would be more likely to trust them because they themselves respected religion. In an irreligious society, it may well be a disadvantage for religious operating in some environments.

Despite some shortcomings as a leader, Mother Mary is a great inspiration in perseverance, sacrifice, humility and charity. Like Mother Elizabeth, Mother Mary’s humility was recognized by many. Mother Mary once said, “I would rather be able to take humiliation well than to raise the dead to life. If I could raise the dead to life, I might still lose my own soul; but if I became truly humble in all things I am assured of salvation.” It was her great humility and compassion which won her access to the hearts of the poor. By performing simple, kind but lowly deeds, she embodied the core of the Gospel, the message of God’s wonderful mercy.
6 Bugler [p.7].
10 Boardman 7.
12 Curtin.
13 Bugler.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Boardman 10.
17 Bugler.
18 Ibid.
19 Boardman 11.
21 Boardman, 13.
22 Boardman, 12.
23 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Boardman 14-15.
29 Boardman 19.
31 Boardman 14.


Christifideles Laici 145.


Boardman 2.


Boardman 3.


Boardman 4.

Boardman 22.

CCC, Glossary, 867.

Apostolicam Actositatem, Chapter VI, 30.


referred to under the pseudonym “Katie Barret” in Kathleen Boardman’s biography, to protect her identity, Boardman 16.


Bugler [5].

Boardman 28.

64 Boardman 25.
66 Boardman 17.
69 Boardman 25.
72 Boardman 26.
73 Boardman 43.
74 Sister Mary Teresita 33.
75 Limerick 37-41.
76 Limerick 40.
77 Limerick 43-44.
78 Boardman, center plates between p. 112 and 113.
79 Boardman 84.
80 Boardman 20.
81 Sister Mary Teresita 33.
84 Boardman 34.
85 Schwertner 236.
86 Boardman 23, 95.
87 Boardman 209.
88 Boardman 34.
89 Boardman 16.
90 Ibid.
91 *Christifideles Laici.* 102.
92 Boardman 61.
93 Sister Mary Siena, O. P., “The nursing Sister with the black bag,” *Hospital Progress,* June, 1951, p. 182.
94 Boardman 28-29.
95 Boardman 47.
96 Boardman, center plates between p. 112 and 113.
97 Boardman 37.
98 Boardman 38.
99 Boardman 95.
100 Boardman 38.
101 Boardman 38.
102 Schwertner 238.
103 Boardman 108.
104 Boardman 35.
105 Boardman 35.
106 Schwertner 239.
Sister Mary Teresita 31.

Boardman 30.

Boardman 30-31.

Boardman 31.


Boardman 15.

Boardman 41.

Boardman 42.

Boardman 43.

Boardman 36.

Ibid.

Boardman 114.


Limerick 66.

It appears that the official records of the chapter at St. Vincent Ferrer’s parish at that time have either been lost, or cannot be located at this time. This is based on current members of the chapter at the time of this writing, as well as the archivist at the Dominican House of Studies.


Ibid.


Sister Mary Joseph 83-84.

Sister Mary Joseph 87.

Sister Mary Joseph 84.

Ibid.

Boardman 45.

Boardman 47.

Boardman 49.

Boardman 54.

Boardman 56.

Boardman 59.

Boardman 62-63.


Picture of Fr. Peter J. O’Callaghan, C. S. P., Boardman, center plates between 112 and 113.

Sister Mary Teresita 34.

Ibid.

Sister Mary Teresita 38.


Boardman 73.

Ibid.


200 Boardman 114.
http://dominicanhistory.blogspot.com/2012/12/very-reverend-father-raymond-meagher-op.html
202 Boardman 114.
205 Boardman 118.
206 Boardman 126-127.
207 Boardman 137.
208 Ibid.
209 Boardman 137-138.
210 Sister Mary Jean Dorcy 573.
211 Sister Mary Teresita 39.
212 Ibid.
213 Sister Mary Teresita 40.
214 Boardman 161.
216 Ibid.
217 Boardman 165.
218 Boardman 166.
219 Boardman 180.
220 Ibid.
221 Boardman 181.
222 Ibid.
223 Boardman 182.
224 Ibid.
225 Boardman 183-184.
226 Boardman 200-201.
227 Boardman, frontispiece.
229 Boardman 170
230 Sister Mary Teresita 41.
231 Drane 76.
233 Sister Mary Teresita 42.
234 Boardman 174.
235 Boardman 179.
236 Boardman 178-179.
237 Boardman 197.
238 Boardman 198.
239 Boardman 204-206.
240 Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, 573.
241 Phone conversation with burial counselor, Calvary Catholic Cemetery, New York City, around 20 February 2013.
242 Schwertner 240.
243 Sister Mary Siena 183.

39


 Ibid.,


Ibid.


Ronneburger.


Ibid.


Ibid.