

A COURAGEOUS WITNESS TO FAITH



M. Vojtěcha Hasmandová

The Servant of God, Mother **VOJTĚCHA HASMANDOVÁ**

(Born in Huštěnovice in 1914; died in Znojmo – Hradiště in 1988)

The whole Church is celebrating the anniversary of the Second Vatican Council as the Year of Faith. In our country we are also marking the anniversary of when two brothers from Thessalonica, Cyril and Methodius, our fathers in faith, arrived in Great Moravia in 1150. Moreover, we are celebrating the jubilee of one of the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo, Servant of God, Mother Vojtěcha Hasmandová. On **21st January 2013** it was twenty-five years since her death in Znojmo-Hradiště, and on **25th March 2014** one hundred years since her birth in Huštěnovice near Velehrad.

She heard God's call to the religious life at a very young age. After a period of religious formation and studies at the Pedagogical Institute in Prague she worked as a teacher. During the war she worked as a nurse, and later she held the position of Superior of the Community in Prachatice. She spent eight years in a communist prison accused of treason. After her release she lived in a large community of Mercy Sisters in Vidnava near the Polish border.

From 1970 till her death on **21st January 1988** she served as Mother General of the Mercy Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo in Znojmo-Hradiště.

Her time as Mother General began at the end of Vatican II and concluded in the year of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo in the Czech Republic.

...»It is our duty to get down to the work which our times demand with joy and without fear, and to continue on the path which the Church has been walking for almost twenty centuries«. The words of Pope John XXIII, with which he started Vatican II, well describe the enthusiasm with which Mother Vojtěcha approached the implementation of the Council's decrees within her Community.

Remembering his meeting with her, the Bishop of Brno, Mons. Vojtěch Cikrle, wrote: *»When I met her I perceived the closeness to God of a woman who was fully devoted to Him«.*

In Brno, on 28th November 1996, less than nine years after her death, her beatification and canonization process was opened.

Who was Mother Vojtěcha?

The desire for holiness ran like a thread through her life from her earliest youth. She also inspired her sisters in the Community and all who came into contact with her to holiness.

»This year there is a big task ahead of us – renewal according to Vatican II. The deepening of our spiritual life is the uncompromising duty of each one of us, and to neglect this could be fatal to our souls.

Do not forget that we are the chosen people of God, and the Church is the light of the nations. Our religious life is part of that light through our vows, our life of prayer and sacrifice. Through our persevering effort for good we contribute to the brightness of that light«.

(From a New Year's letter, 2nd January 1971)

1914–1927

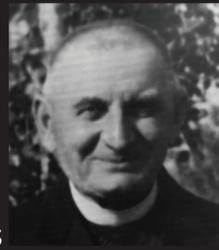
FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD



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1. The Church of St. Anne in Huštěnovice.
2. Thirteen-year-old Tonečka with her nieces, the day before entering the monastery on 5th July 1927.
3. Fr. Jakub Holeček, a priest who worked in Huštěnovice in her childhood.
4. The primary school which Tonečka attended for 5 years.
5. Baptismal font in St Anne's Church.

Sister Vojtěcha, was born on **25th March 1914** in Huštěnovice (the district of Uherské Hradiště) and named Antonia, (“Tonečka” for short).

Her father was Florian Hasmanda, b. 3rd May 1854, and her mother was Rosalia, nee Chrástková, b. 28th September 1881. They married on 6th November 1901 in Huštěnovice.

She had six siblings: Mary (b. 1902), Augustin (b. 1904), Clementine (b. 1906), Franciska (b. 1908, a Sister of St. Charles Borromeo, with the religious name Simeona), Anna (b. 1912, a Sister of St. Charles Borromeo, with the religious name of Emilie), and a second brother Vojtěch (b. 1920).

She was baptised in the church of St. Anna in Huštěnovice on **1st April 1914**.

On 4th February 1920, when Tonečka was six, her mother, Rosalia, died. The oldest sister, Mary, looked after the younger siblings. In a letter from prison, which was never delivered to her sister Mary, Mother Vojtěcha recalled lovingly:

»So I remember, dear Mary, all of the Christmas Eves that I spent at home. I do not remember our mother making a beautiful Christmas Eve dinner, but I do remember you: your preparations, your work and, with the help of our papa, your efforts to replace the person who left us so prematurely... You see Mary, in those days it seemed to me, and to the others of course, that you were in charge of things, thinking it was your duty. Today, however, I understand everything more profoundly and I am so very grateful to you for those beautiful moments, for your thoughtful care, for the magic of Christmas, and particularly that it was important to you to make sure that we wouldn't miss our mother too much. Indeed, I even think mama died happier when she saw you being so reliable and doing everything so well. May God reward you for it!«

She attended primary school in Huštěnovice in 1920-1925. On **12th May 1923** she made her First Holy Communion.

The loving environment and practice of the faith in the Hasmanda family bore its fruit in the form

of vocations to the consecrated life. One of her sisters Franciska went to the Congregation of St. Charles Borromeo in Prague Pod Petřínem. After her novitiate her older sister Mary visited her on behalf of the family.

It happened that on her return from this visit Mary didn't bring the gift of a beautiful doll that her younger sister, Tonečka, hoped and longed for. However, in the middle of her disappointment, Mary's account of the Infant Jesus of Prague and of the sisters called to be brides of Christ, caught Tonečka's attention far more than the doll she had wanted. At that moment of unfulfilled expectations, the eight-year-old child recognized and accepted the gift of a religious calling. She herself described it as a moment of grace – kairos. She was utterly enraptured by this discovery. From that moment she wanted to become “a bride of Christ”. This idea never left her.

On **31st May 1926** she received the Sacrament of Confirmation, at Velehrad. She attended the primary school in Babice until 1927.

Tonečka chose older friends to play with. The closest one was Tonečka Habáňová. Above all love for the Lord Jesus was what drew them together. The experience of her friend leaving to go into the Franciscan monastery in Opava, without telling her about it, or saying good bye, was a great test for her. It seems that accepting this disappointment caused her to become more independent and to be more realistic about her own walk with God. At the time she was 11 years old.

The political periods in which Tonečka spent her childhood:

She was born four months before the start of World War I. Czech was still in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which it had been part of for 300 years. The new emperor, Karl von Habsburg, (now Blessed Karl), after his succession to the throne in 1916, wanted to create a federation of states under the rule of one sovereign. However he was not able to prevent the break-up of his realm. Out of the ruins new states were established, among them Czechoslovakia on 28th October 1918, made up of the Czech lands, and Slovakia, which had been

the part of Hungary for one thousand years. In this period another political event occurred, which influenced the lives of people in the newly created republic: on 3rd November 1918 an over-excited anti-Catholic mob destroyed the Marian column in the Old Town Square in Prague. This column had been erected in the 17th century to commemorate the victory of Catholic Prague over the Swedish Lutherans. The Catholic Church was humiliated in meetings, magazines and newspapers, and its mistakes exaggerated.

A Reformist movement, called “The Unity of Catholic Clergy”, spread into the ranks of the priests and influenced the life of the Church. The radical wing, which demanded principally the abolition of celibacy, was unsuccessful with its demands in Rome and left the Church. More than 300 dissatisfied priests founded their own religious society called “The Church of Czechoslovakia” on 8th January 1920. This church gained followers because they used the Czech language in the liturgy and abolished celibacy. It had about eight hundred thousand believers in 1930.

The anniversary of the death of the reformer Jan Hus, condemned by the council of Constance and burnt to death on 6th July 1415, was commemorated with great celebrations in 1925. In fact, instead of the national flag, the flag with the Hussite chalice was raised over Prague Castle, the seat of the President. In protest, the Holy See, which had its own diplomatic representation in Prague in 1920, withdrew its nuncio, Mons. Marmaggi. Only at the end of 1927 was an agreement with the Vatican reached (“Modus Vivendi”), and diplomatic relations fully restored at the beginning of 1928.

Against the background of political changes in our country, Tonečka Hasmandová also experienced a big change in her personal life. She fought a hard battle concerning her calling to the service of God, especially with her father. She won with the help of God, and at the age of thirteen she became a candidate for the religious life in the provincial house in Frýdlant nad Ostravicí on 6th July 1927.

1927 Frýdlant nad Ostravici – 1933 Prague

HER RELIGIOUS CALLING



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1. Graduate at Teacher Training Institute in Prague.
2. The Church of St Bartholomew in Frýdlant upon Ostravice.
3. On a school trip in Děčínské Rocks, in the first row, the third from the left.
4. Bedřich's Institute in Frýdlant nad Ostravici, the provincial house which she entered on 6th July 1927.
5. The mother house of the Congregation of St. Charles Borromeo, with hospital, in Prague, Pod Petřínem.

The change from school and home to convent life at such a young age was not easy for a simple but determined girl. She suffered from homesickness and often had to fight against grief. She writes about this in her memoirs. However, she stood by her decision and learned to stand in faith. From childhood she had been determined to become a saint and she lived her whole life to bring this about.

In 1929 she finished the 4th form of the girls' school in the provincial house of the Borromeo Congregation in Frýdlant nad Ostravici.

On **1st September 1929** she went to study at the Teacher Training Institute U Sv. Anny in Prague. Whilst there, she attended the 1929 celebrations of St. Wenceslas Day, which marked a complete change in the relations between church and state. The government adopted the celebration and established it as a national holiday. Even the president of the Republic was present.

At the age of 17 "Romanka" (Tonečka's nickname at the time) had to endure another trial on her journey through life: her beloved father, Florián Hasmanda died unexpectedly on 11th November 1931. After his funeral, on 17th November 1931, Tonečka wrote from Huštěnovice about their father's death to her sister Franciska (Sr. Simeona).

*»Dear sister,
You have of course received the sorrowful news of our dear papa's death. It came so unexpectedly and you must have been terribly surprised by it, as we all were. Even as they accompanied me to the station and after a very sad overnight journey, and when I found myself standing over a cold corpse, I still could not believe it. I do not like to remember what I experienced at that moment. Our pain was enormous, especially because you two were missing from our family circle. We were*

all able to imagine your situation, and that made it even worse...

Well, dear sister, do not worry any more, papa is certainly happy that God gave him the grace of being called home after making a holy confession. Sacrifice your pain for him. This will benefit him much, because the value of such sacrifice is great. I am also writing to Sr. Emilie. I feel with you, but I pray for you too. With many greetings from us all,

Your sister, Antonie«

For several months after her return to Prague the pain and sadness of this loss grieved her young soul. "Romanka" wrote what she was experiencing in her journal. She expressed her pain and her hope in poems, into which she not only poured her grief, but also her unshakable faith and confidence. As an orphan, she submitted herself into the care and protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Marian devotions guided her through the next period of her life.

On 11th March 1932, as her 18th birthday was approaching, she realised the seriousness of her personal calling: that she needed release from grief and family ties, and to open herself up entirely to her new calling, to belong to the Lord. She expresses this in the following poem:

*Oh, loved ones, just let me go.
Peace escapes me here; I can no longer stay.
I can hear a silent calling from the distance:
It's my Lord calling me gently.
It is now time for me to take up and carry my cross.*

*...See, here I am. I am yours, all yours.
Whether you tell the storm to hide me in a cloud
Or whether you still the storm with the power of your word,
My gaze will always be fixed on You.*

*Be silent, O World! You speak, my Master.
For I am willing to obey your command.*

*Whoever is a prisoner of God
Will forever be free!*

In the following prayer (on the 9th September 1932) she expressed her understanding of what it meant to live her calling:

»Oh, Lord, replant your flower in the garden of your love.«

With this conviction in her heart she began her final year of teacher training, and was able to overcome the deep sorrow at her father's death. On 27th November 1932, on the first anniversary of his death, she noted in her journal:

»When a man cannot be happy, he is comforted by the thought that he suffers for someone he loves.«

She graduated with excellent marks on 12th June 1933, and was qualified to teach at state schools and kindergartens.

1933 Praha–Třeboň–Slaný–Brno/Líšeň 1949

NOVITIATE – PROMISES – WORK



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1. Sr. Vojtěcha after her first vows.
2. Sr. Vojtěcha in Brno-Líšeň in 1947 with procession of children.
3. Sr. Vojtěcha in Brno-Líšeň with children.
4. Children of Třeboň with Sisters on a trip.
5. Hospital in Slaný, where she cared for wounded soldiers.
6. View of the convent school in Brno-Líšeň in Sr. Vojtěcha's time.

The beginning of Sister Vojtěcha's religious life and her teaching career was influenced by the difficult political situation in our country. During the Nazi Protectorate (March 1939–May 1945) the Sisters were not allowed to teach or study, and Sister Vojtěcha could not continue her teacher training at the University. She accepted this with equanimity. During the war, she helped to care for the sick and wounded, as well as teaching children in the school.

After passing her final exams, she entered the novitiate in Prague. On **14th August 1933** she received her habit and her new name, Vojtěcha. Her first year in the novitiate passed quickly, a fact that she wrote about with regret. From 1st September 1934, the second year of her novitiate, she began teaching at the convent school in Třeboň. She then returned to Prague to prepare for her first vows. She made these in Prague in the Mother House on **15th August 1935**. On a photo taken on the day she wrote:

»This is the memoir of the most beautiful day of my life. However, it is not the one who begins, but the one who finishes that will be crowned!«

She worked in Třeboň until 1st August 1939, when she returned to the Mother House in Prague for six months to prepare for her final vows. At the same time she was appointed as a teacher in the convent school in Prague.

At the beginning of September 1939 Sr. Vojtěcha, then 25 years old, wrote to her niece, (who later joined the Sisters of Charles Borromeo as Sr. Leona) and to the other children of her family:

»My dear Mařenka, I wish you all the best for your Name Day, and especially that you would be a joy to your parents,

but above all a joy to God. And so, Mařenka, when you look back on your day, your Guardian Angel would always be able to give you top marks.

But then if anything should happen in the day that stops you getting that top mark, may your Angel carry your sorrow to heaven instead. Learn to do this each day, Mařenka, and teach it also to the others. You see, I am addressing this to you because you're celebrating your Name Day, but I mean it for all of you children. I would have loved to send each of you a picture but they wouldn't have all fitted in the envelope. Besides, all my things are still packed, so that I don't even have a proper pen to write with. I am sorry that your Auntie, the teacher, has such bad writing. I love you all very much. God bless you! Sr. Vojtěcha«

On **19th March 1940** she made her final vows in the presence of Mother Klemetina Zaubmüller in the Mother House in Prague. On 21st August 1941 she returned to Třeboň, where she taught at the convent school until 22nd April 1942. The sisters in the hospital in Slane had asked for help, and after asking permission from her community, Sr. Vojtěcha completed the necessary training and signed up to care for the sick. From 3rd November 1942 until 31st August 1945 she took care of wounded German and Russian soldiers with great love and courage. Here, close to these patients, she was so happy that when the schools were reopened in 1945, she deeply missed this work.

Two sisters have memories of this period in Sr. Vojtěcha's life. One of them says: **»I remember the day of liberation from the Nazis in the revolution of 1945. German soldiers were being shot outside, and left on the floor of the corridor of the surgery, some still alive. A strict order was issued that nobody should care for them in any way. We had to go down this corridor when we went for**

lunch. Some of the soldiers raised up their hands to ask us for water. We were terrified. But then Sr. Vojtěcha came along. She immediately ran for water and served them. She wasn't afraid. She was an example of courageous love and mercy.«

The other sister remembers: **»Russians came after the Germans. We were instructed to learn Russian to be able to care for the wounded Russian soldiers. I remember Sr. Vojtěcha was excellent at this. However, one day she was assaulted by a Russian soldier. He tried to grab hold of her, but she pushed him away. She stood under the cross hanging on the wall of the hospital room, and looked straight into the eyes of the soldier and said, pointing to the cross: "I belong to that man on the cross!" The soldier withdrew a step and gasped: "Madonna". After that no one dared to bother Sr. Vojtěcha again.«**

After the war Sr. Vojtěcha taught in the convent school for girls in Brno-Líšeň. She was also Headmistress from 4th September 1945 until 11th February 1949. Sr. Vojtěcha recalled these four years of teaching with love:

»God gave me the grace that wherever I was, I was happy there. I gave my all to the school in Líšeň. I loved the children – and they loved us.«

PRACHATICE



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1. Superior in Prachatice
2. Prachatice – View of the Hospital
3. Panorama of Prachatice
4. Birthplace of St. Jan Nepomuk Neumann
5. St. Jan Nepomuk Neumann
6. Mother Bohumila Langrova, Mother General of the Mercy Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo in Prague.

After the war, new bishops were consecrated and this brought new hope for a revival of the Church in Czechoslovakia and its faithfulness to the Holy See. According to the “Beneš Decrees” the three million citizens with German nationality who were living in the Sudeten lands were moved out of Czechoslovakia into Germany and Austria.

Even the Congregation of St. Charles Borromeo was affected by the decree and about 300 Sisters were moved out of the Republic into Austria. This included the former Mother General, Klementina Zaunmüller, who, having grasped the situation in time, gave up her office and went into exile on 1st May 1945. The Communists came to power on 25th February 1948 when President Edward Beneš was forced by the Communist leader, Klement Gottwald, to approve a new government made up of Communists and minor collaborating parties. The Social Democrat party merged with the Communist Party. Beneš refused to sign the new socialist constitution in May; he was forced to resign and died in September 1948. He was succeeded by Klement Gottwald. It wasn't long before attacks against the Church began. In the middle of saying Mass at the Cathedral of St Vitus, Archbishop Josef Beran was taken and placed under house arrest in his residence in Prague, and later interned for 15 years in various places outside Prague. In June 1949 government officials were placed in each of the Bishops' residences, and took control of the archives and Episcopal offices. Also in June 1949 the Communists established an organisation called “Catholic Action” in the presence of and with the

help of some collaborating priests. The purpose was to create a national Catholic Church, which would be separated from the Pope. The Vatican replied with an immediate excommunication of the leading collaborators and so “Catholic Action” failed in its purpose. On 14th October 1949 the National Assembly passed the “Ecclesiastical laws” which outlawed the Church. The State Office for Religious Affairs was established and laws controlling the finances and assets of Churches and Religious Societies were introduced.

When all the church schools were closed, Sr. Vojtěcha stayed in the Mother House in Prague from 12th February 1949. She undertook several offices, including the administration of the hospital Pod Petřín. She stayed there until April 1950.

Her correspondence reveals how she persevered on the path to holiness. These same letters reveal that her thinking and her determination to keep up a healthy spiritual walk were real in her own life and not just something she wrote about to others. For example, she encouraged her older sister: **»Be happy and climb higher and higher. Yours, Sr. Vojtěcha«** (1 January 1947, Brno-Líšeň).

On 30th April 1950 Sr. Vojtěcha was appointed Superior of the Community in Prachatice, the birthplace of St. Jan Nepomuk Neumann. At the same time, she also became the Manager of a care home.

»Then we had her as the Superior in Prachatice for a short time. We were all enjoying her love.

She was interested in everyone and especially in our spiritual life. When talking to us individually she always insisted in knowing about the details of how we lived our spiritual lives.« (from the memoirs of a sister of the Prachatice community)

In 1950 she wrote this note to a junior sister in her Community: **»If you want to be holy, you will be. But it will cost you. The amount you devote yourself is the amount you will receive. Everywhere... in everything, in every moment... do not belong to yourself, nor to anyone else, just to the Lord.**« (1950, to a young Sister of Prachatice Community).

From April 1951, at the request of her Mother General Bohumila Langrová, she had been hiding Fr. Remigius Janča, OFM, who had escaped during the abolition of the men's monasteries. He led spiritual exercises for the Sisters of the Congregation who came to Prachatice on holiday. Sr. Vojtěcha accepted this difficult task in the spirit of a few words that the Mother General wrote on a card for her: “Faithful unto death”. At that point she had no idea just how dramatically things would turn out.

1952–1953 from Prachatice to České Budějovice

ARRESTED AND SENTENCED



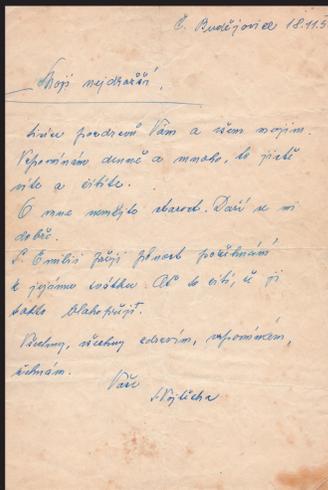
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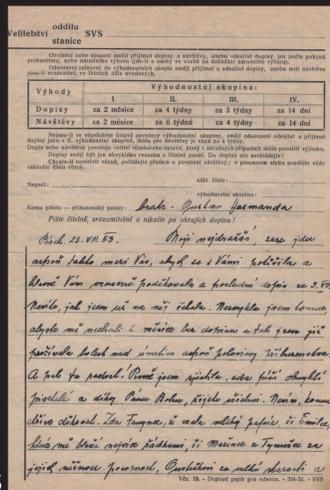
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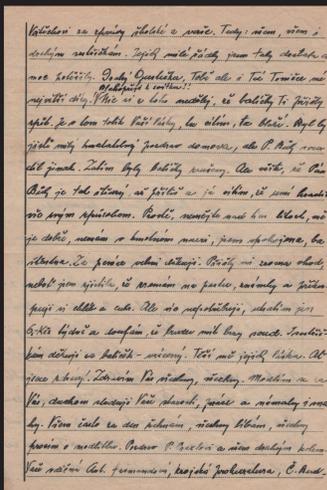
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1. The picture of Sr. Vojtěcha on the day of imprisonment, 38 years old
2. Her brother Gustav
3. The building of the Regional Court in České Budějovice
4. The first letter of Sr. Vojtěcha from prison
5. The only letter from Písek
6. Fr. Remigius Janča, OFM

The State's move to restrict the life of the orders and congregations in our country was called "Action K". It was carefully planned, and targeted the superiors in particular in order to eliminate the influence of monks and nuns on the public.

The main action against the men's orders and congregations took place on the night of 14th April 1950. Members of the Secret State Police and the National Security of the People's Militia burst violently into the monasteries. The Superiors were ordered to summon all the monks, who were subjected to a personal inspection and were allowed to keep just a few personal belongings. They were forced to get onto buses and were transported to internment camps. Twenty-four orders and congregations were affected by Action K. A total of 1240 monks were imprisoned without trial, and in Bohemia 1200 monks were interned in monasteries. In Slovakia 75 religious houses were confiscated, and turned into "camps" where 1136 monks from religious orders were sent.

The press and radio told the public that the monks were only interested in intrigues and plots against the regime, and that they carried out the orders of the Vatican for subversive activities. They also accused monks of keeping weapons in their monasteries, and of providing shelter for spies and even murderers. Through these new measures the leaders of the Regime claimed that they wanted to enable the religious orders to return to their original calling. "Action K" was known among Czech people as "The night of St Bartholomew", and in Slovakia as "Barbaric Night".

Apart from the internments, the Regime sent young seminarians, monks and priests, into what were called Auxiliary Technical Battalions (PTP) when they were of age for compulsory military service. These PTPs were effectively forced labour camps, 'service' being for an indefinite period of time (36 months or more). After working hard all day in the woods, on the roads or building military facilities, these young people had to undergo two hours of brainwashing in Marxism-Leninism.

Persecution of the women's orders

After the liquidation of the men's orders and congregations it was obvious to the Church that the women's orders would soon be affected. On **25th September 1950** the State Office for Religious Affairs summoned the Superiors of all the women's congregations to Prague and ordered them to vacate their houses immediately as they were being confiscated by the State for other purposes. On the same day government agents were sent to all the houses to ensure this happened. The evacuation of the sisters began on St. Wenceslas' Day, **28 September 1950**. These sisters were then accommodated in unsuitable buildings and made to work in unhealthy environments (e.g. chemical factories). Superiors were isolated from their communities and in summer 1952 all those in any authority were placed in an internment camp in Hejnice in northern Bohemia. A number of rigged charges were made against the nuns, especially against the Superiors and those holding positions of authority, and many sisters were sentenced to long years in prison.

Action against the bishops

Archbishop Beran of Prague was put into isolation by the new regime. Other bishops soon followed. Dioceses were administered by the Vicar Generals.

Sr. Vojtěcha Hasmandová was imprisoned for eight years for sheltering a young Franciscan. On **9th September 1952** in České Budějovice a warrant was issued by the State Police for her arrest. On 10th September 1952 Sr. Vojtěcha, Fr. Remigius Janča OFM, and other Sisters from the Prachatice community were arrested and imprisoned in České Budějovice. She was held in custody until 5th November 1953. From 16th September 1952 till 28th April 1953 she was (together with other prisoners) subjected to interrogation about her "subversive activities". The main trial was held at the Regional Court in České Budějovice from 17th till 19th September 1953. All those on trial were accused of belonging to a subversive group, a fiction on the part of the prosecution, created so that these religious could be charged of treason. During the main court hearing on **17th September 1953** Sr. Vojtěcha said among other things:

»From the age of ten I wanted to enter the convent. I was inspired only by my desire to dedicate my life to God.» When accused of treason she replied: "I think to serve God is to serve people. In performing this service I did my best with my whole heart. I think I gave a good education to the young people I taught in school, so I stand with a clear conscience. I educated the children to be obedient to God and to promote the good of their fellow-men.«

On **19th September 1953** the judgement was pronounced in Písek. Sr. Vojtěcha was convicted of treason as a Vatican spy and sentenced to eight years in prison. Fr. Janča was sentenced to nine years, and the other sisters were given lesser sentences. Among other things, the charge stated: *»All the accused... seriously betrayed our nation; they put financial gain through deliberate, blind obedience to the Vatican, above any sense of loyalty to their country. They became mercenaries of imperialism, with which the Vatican willingly colludes, covering its material interests with the mask of religion...*

However, of the accused women, Hasmandová showed the greatest initiative, and was a significant instigator of criminal acts. It was also obvious from her behaviour that she was motivated by the desire to climb the hierarchical ladder of authority within the Church through her subversive activities.«

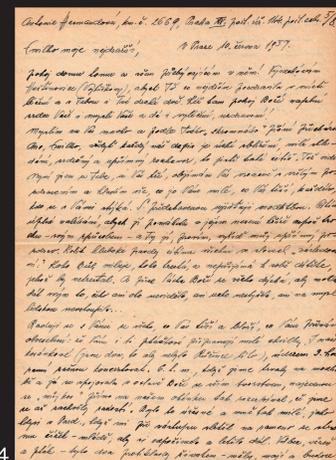
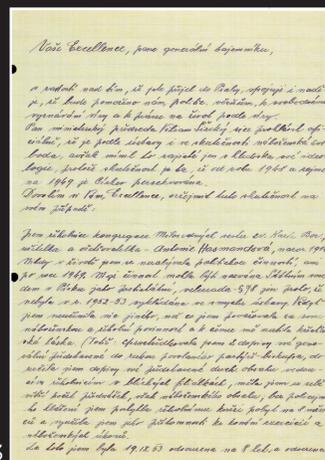
Part of the punishment for treason, was the confiscation of all property, belongings and capital. They were not deprived of their citizenship but were temporarily deprived of their civil rights; in Sr. Vojtěcha's case it was for five years. The prisoners also had to pay the costs of the criminal proceedings.

1953–1960

IN THE PRISON IN PARDUBICE AND IN PANKRÁC



PARDUBICE



1. Convicted, 39 year-old Antonie Hasmandová
2. Prison in Padubice
3. Letter to the UN Secretary General
4. Letter to Sr. Emilie from Pankrác. She also greets other nuns through a specially devised code, including the Vicar General under the nickname "Lilá".

On 5th November 1953 the judgment came into force and Sr. Vojtěcha went to the prison in Pardubice. The sentence was to last until September 1960, and it affected her health. The prison records show that she suffered from inflammation of the kidneys and pulmonary TB.

On 6th November 1955 she informed her brother Gustav that she was only allowed two correspondents from her closest relatives. She encourages them in these words:

»I know it is painful for you that I do not receive everything you send me, but do not be sorry for that. Indeed, others get joy from what causes us pain, and perhaps this is the only joy they have. So it is worth it, isn't it? We never lose anything because we gain higher and greater rewards through whatever we find difficult or sorrowful. Therefore, Simeona, my dear, do not be sad!«
(From an undelivered letter marked as "defective").

On 29th July 1956, along with eleven fellow prisoners, she writes a letter from Pardubice to the UN Secretary General Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld on the occasion of his visit to Czechoslovakia, in which they protest against the restriction of civil rights and religious freedom in prison:

...»Your Excellency, you are certainly a defender of justice by the title of your position, and therefore it will seem to you incredible that such a situation exists in a state where religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution. Indeed, throughout the whole world (even in Nazi prisons) the basic necessities are provided to ensure the possibility of a proper religious life for prisoners. For us it is not like that. There were chapels in all our prisons, but these have been closed or turned into meeting rooms. As far as the possibility of a normal attendance of Mass or any form of worship, we cannot even dream of it...«

Because of this letter greater restrictions were imposed on her for three months and as a further punishment she was transferred for two years to a stricter prison in Prague-Pankrác. From there, in protest, she wrote a letter to Colonel Dr. Ulrich Majdr (responsible for all the prisons in Czechoslovakia).

»Mr. Colonel, I do not complain about StB (the State Secret Police) in Pardubice, nor about my move to Pankrác. However, above all I protest against the reasons for your decision!«

In this letter she bravely defended the basic rights of believers to express their faith even in prison. She also told him that she realised her letter to the UN Secretary had not been delivered.

»My letter was not delivered to the addressee. That was certainly against the law. I appeal, therefore, to a much higher authority and this is, Mr. Colonel, your conscience! You have added further wrongs to the past ones. (...) You increased the already harsh treatment towards us. You should have presumed that after such a long imprisonment we were already ill, and yet you put even more pressure on our health. You deprived us again of contact with our families for a long season, and there was no question of even minor relaxation of the severe restrictions, which would have been normal anywhere else. Is it human, Mr. Colonel? Is this your job, one that a righteous man is able to do?«

Because she didn't want to work on Sundays, she was disciplined and was punished by greater restrictions for a month and put into solitary confinement.

It is evident from the report of the interrogation on 19th March 1957 that Sr. Vojtěcha, prison number 2669, and from the regular assessments, that *»she absolutely did not regret her criminal offence and considers herself as a religious martyr. She is only interested in the growth of the Church and she has absolutely no interest in secular affairs. She reads the papers, but she has her own opinion of the Press. She considers that she was wrongly sentenced, because legally she has not committed any crime, at least that is how she perceives her actions, and she has no intention of giving up her opinion. ... The enforcement of the sentence has had no effect on the prisoner. She still constantly considers that God controls everything well.«*

The President announced an amnesty on 1st December 1957, but the officials in charge of implementing it decided that Sister Vojtěcha was not to be included. She was returned to the prison in Pardubice on 3rd September 1958. She was released on probation only after the presidential amnesty of 9th May 1960. She was let off the remaining four months and one day of her prison sentence, and her civil rights and standing were restored to her.

The next day, on 10th May 1960, this report from Pardubice on Sister Vojtěcha was delivered to the Department of Labour in Znojmo:

»She never had any positive attitude to her term in prison and several times she initiated various revolts. She should be isolated from other workers, because she would be a bad influence. As for work, she was just an average worker, without any interest in work or in meeting targets, and she was even repulsed by such things. Almost nothing was achieved through her re-education.«

On 11th May 1960 Sister Vojtěcha was released from prison. On her release she wrote three comments to do with her imprisonment on her discharge paper: about the injustices against religious freedom, about her disagreement with forced labour on Sundays, and about the sanctions which she and other women were placed under. At the same time she had to sign a declaration of secrecy about any information she acquired during her detention and imprisonment.

The sisters and women imprisoned with her testify about her heroic faith, love and forgiveness. Despite her own suffering, she helped everyone, and her letters written in prison reveal her great love and thankfulness. Some of these letters were not delivered, but were filed away in the prison archives.

Later she spoke about her imprisonment as a period of God's mercy: *»They were fruitful years in the net of God's love.«* She rarely mentioned the suffering she had experienced.

1960 Božice–Vidnava 1965

AFTER RELEASE FROM PRISON



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1. Sr. Vojtěcha travelling in a car in 1962
2. Houses where she lived with a large community of 110 sisters
3. The Church of St. Francis in Vidnava.
4. Street in Vidnava leading to the Community houses where the next part of her life began
5. Her youngest brother Vojtěch Hasmanda
6. Natural beauty surrounding Vidnava which helped her to convalesce after her return from prison

Sister Vojtěcha was released from prison in Pardubice on **11th May 1960**. She sent her sister, Sr. Emilie Hasmandová in Božice a telegram from Pardubice with the happy news of her release. She spent the first weeks of freedom in Božice, near Znojmo. She was aware that she was being watched. She felt low, tearful, and at the end of her strength, but happy to be free.

She writes to Sr. Doloris

»Dear Dolinka, the peace and love of God be with you all! Yesterday was the joyful day of my return. I cannot say that I feel normal. As you would understand, I feel like crying all the time. Emilka comforts me by saying that it will pass. Perhaps she has already seen you go through the same experience. ... Within six days, we have to report to our local Department of Labour (ONV) and then we will soon move on with our lives. Everyone sends you their greetings. They remember you with love.«
(Božice, 12th May 1960)

She writes to her loved ones in Huštěnovice from the community she was sent to in Vidnava, a small town on the Polish border. She writes about her first Christmas in freedom, and about the consequences of her imprisonment:

»My dearest ones, may the peace and love of God be with you! This year it is difficult to wish you a "happy" Christmas. I know that you are all experiencing pain. Even I was forced to stay in bed on St. Stephen's Day. Headache, vomiting..., I had to leave Mass. I could not even go to Holy Communion because of the vomiting, which I was sorry about. For us all, our nerves are shattered. Do not be surprised. It was my first Christmas back, and I spent it in tears. Although I bow myself in willing surrender to the will of God, my body isn't able to go along with my will, it rebels and sometimes just breaks down. I offer up these sufferings in the hope that they will at least help Vojtěch.« (Vidnava, 29th December 1960).

She regularly writes to her sister Simeona, who is taking care of their youngest brother Vojtěch, who is dying in Huštěnovice:

»My dearest sister, Simeona, May the peace and the love of God be with you as you care for your patient and at all times. ... God strengthen you, my dear sister, and give you so much gentleness and love to perceive even the most hidden pain and ease it without saying a word. I'm sure you know that my thoughts are always with you, and I will be grateful for any news. Yours, Sr. Vojtěcha« (Vidnava, 5th January 1961).

Even a year after her release she expresses her lack of inner strength, made worse by the suffering of her youngest brother Vojtěch:

»My dear sister Emilie, may the peace and love of God be with you!

It is so long after Christmas and I still haven't written. My dear sister, I am sure you understand. Believe me; I do not have enough strength (mental) to write a proper letter. You know why. News from home is getting worse and worse. And yet, there is much beauty in the painful news. I am amazed at God's love for Vojtěch. How much gentleness the Lord God has for those who seek Him with sincerity of heart. I'm sure, he also wrote to you. I am glad that he has accepted everything and knows what to expect. Vojtěch grew deeper through the sickness, so we can only envy him. ... And now God's love gently embraces him.

I am writing this to you, dear sister, to comfort you, and I know that we both see things in the same way. But I am also writing to support you. All we can do is to thank God's love again and again which is so gentle even when allowing us to go through pain. We are in debt to God, to people and to our own souls. As I don't know how to thank God for His goodness, I tell Him that I will be happy when I can thank Him face to face. ...

At the moment I am working in an office. We are working hard to finish the annual accounts. They are almost done.

But we have had to put our all into it and are still doing so. I really look forward to when it will all be finished. Don't spread this around, between me and you, I really don't take to office work! How I loved our old attics and sorting out their contents! I was really in my element there. But I am happy here because God wants me to be here. It can almost be amusing searching through sheets and sheets of figures for a single penny and then, with a cry of joy, you find "the lost drachma". And at other times you rejoice at how well it's all going, but you still feel a tension because until the last tap of the adding machine you don't know if you will get a good or a bad surprise.

In all the pain I am contented and grateful to God's infinite love. And how about you, my dear sister? We still have a lot of work to do, but I am writing this quickly so you won't worry about me. Please don't be anxious about anything or anyone. We are in God's hands and there, we endure the things that we suffer quite differently. In this sense our pain is joyful and joy is painful. ... Yours gratefully, Sr. Vojtěcha.« (Vidnava 13th January 1961)

She was released from prison on probation for ten years. As a result of another presidential amnesty on **9th May 1965** she was released from the rest of her probation.

1966–1970

THE COMMUNITY OF VIDNAVA



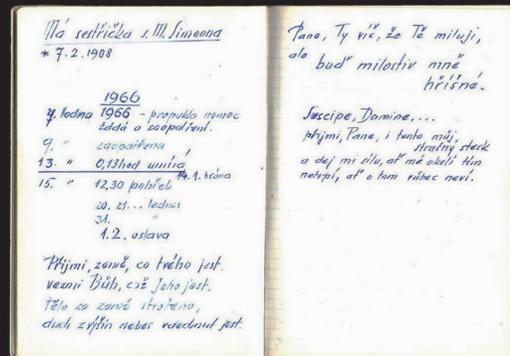
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1. In Vidnava, 1967, wearing the new habit
2. The second House of the Vidnava's community
3. Sr. Simeona.
4. Sr. Vojtěcha's notes about Sr. Simeona's death
5. Visit to Šlukov, 1967
6. Sr. Vojtěcha, sister Emilie and brother Gustav
7. Sr. Vojtěcha at a school reunion

During the 1960s Sr. Vojtěcha kept up a large correspondence. Many letters were preserved. There were about 140 written in prison, and around 400 others. Apart from her family, she also corresponded with former fellow prisoners and classmates. To some of them she was a life mentor, a moral support and a great friend. She kept these friendships until her death. On **13th January 1966** her sister, Sr. Simeona died. Her correspondence and even the notes in her journal show how deeply she was affected by the unexpected death of another sibling. She asked the Lord that no one around her would suffer as a result of her grief.

Sr. Vojtěcha often wrote to Mrs. Milena Grimová, a friend from prison. In one letter she expresses how much she is looking forward to meeting up with her six years after their release from prison, and she also says about herself:

»You know, things are different for me than for you. I have always been happy in the convent. Trust me, there has never been a single moment when I regretted my decision, even at times when the sun didn't shine, moments like those we experienced together. But in the end, you know me well and know that though I am a poor creature, I always did my best to do right throughout those moments which the Lord sent or allowed. Milena, I would like everyone to be happy – but I can't make them happy. This really bothers me. But what can I do? God knows why he destines a man to go in one way and not in another, but what is certain is that he always wills it for our own good.« (Vidnava 12th August 1966)

She encourages her sister Emilie for the first time since their sister Simeona's death: *»Well, my dear Emilka, our sister Simeona is close to God, and who knows how much longer we will live. I think about it every day. Even though I am happy here and appreciate each single day of life, I am still*

looking forward to the moment when eternal light will shine for us, (with fear of course, but with confidence too). A little more battling now, but afterwards, what beauty awaits us!« (Vidnava, 14th November 1966)

When possible she observed the progress of The Second Vatican Council together with the Sisters, and was keeping it in her prayers. In 1967, following the instructions of the Council to adapt to modern times, the design of the order's habit was changed. Sr. Vojtěcha writes to Mrs. Milena Grimova telling her about this change and as Milena had never seen her dressed as a nun, she sent her a photo. She regrets that they had not met yet. She writes to Milena again six months later, to galvanise her into making a radical change in her life. Sr. Vojtěcha also asks her to write her a letter, and expresses her care for Milena and her family.

»How do I make the most of each moment? I would always want to do good. You know, it doesn't always work out, but the Lord sees our good will. And this is where happiness lies: to want to do one's best and to try to do it. What matters is that you want what is good and to share the crumbs of God's love by His grace; to give away the flowers of performing the everyday tasks of life honestly, even though your hands are bleeding. After all, roses have thorns. I always tell myself that God is worth doing everything for, and accepting and giving everything for.« (Vidnava, 21st August 1967).

She wrote this encouragement to her sister Emily on her name day, a year after her previous letter: *»I like to remind myself of these beautiful words: "Our self-denial is the greatest and most effective way to draw souls to Christ." The things we deny ourselves may seem small, but great love is measured by such little things. And the value of our daily sacrifices, work, tiredness and pain*

becomes the most beautiful bouquet we can bring before the tabernacle as we say goodnight to God.« (Vidnava, 19th November 1967)

The events of what we now call "The Prague Spring" brought hopeful expectations of a spring-time for the whole of Czech society and the whole congregation, which was felt even as far away as in the remote community of Vidnava

According to her order's custom Sr. Vojtěcha wrote a record about how God called her. She finished a very vivid account of her childhood with these words:

»Now that a big part of my life is behind me, I can say that I was happy everywhere. Neither in the most difficult moments, nor in my weakness and misery did I ever regret choosing this path to my heavenly Bridegroom. I am grateful for everything in the mercy of God, for my dear heavenly Mother and my patron saints. May the Lord reward the whole congregation for all the good I have received, and for all the love, help and forbearance that my superiors showed me. I thank God especially for Vidnava! I loved it so much because it gave me the most. For me Vidnava was a bitter herb that cured and strengthened me, gave me understanding and healed me. My soul glorifies the Lord!« (Vidnava 26th January 1969)

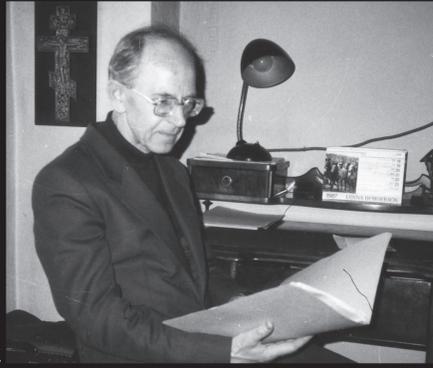
On **1st October 1969** she became the Superior of the Vidnava Community. As a Superior she also played a greater part in preparing for the post-conciliar renewal of our Congregation. Mother General Bohumila Langrová felt that the beginning of the post-Vatican II renewal could only begin with a proper general Chapter meeting. In early July 1970, therefore, Sister Vojtěcha left Vidnava and went to Znojmo-Hradiště for the Chapter meeting.

1970 Vidnava–Znojmo/Hradiště 1976

MOTHER GENERAL



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1. Official photograph of Mother Vojtěcha as Mother General
2. P. Jan Evangelista Vicha, OFM Cap.
3. P. Jan Evangelista Urban, OFM.
4. The Chapel in Nancy
5. The Mother House in Nancy
6. Znojmo-Hradiště

For political reasons the Congregation of the Mercy Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo could not hold proper elections for its Superiors for 34 years. The requirements of Vatican II and the timing of the 'Prague Spring' gave Mother Bohumila Langrová time to prepare for a proper General Chapter. It was held on **8th July 1970**, and Sr. Vojtěcha Hasmandová was elected Mother General. At the same time as new sisters were voted onto the Congregation's General Council, the political situation in our country became much more restrictive again, and the period of "normalization" began. The newly elected Mother General and her Council wrote a letter to the Sisters of all the communities, which became their mission statement. At that time there were 680 sisters in the Congregation in Bohemia, who lived in thirty communities. Mother Vojtěcha started to regularly send news to all the communities about what was happening within the Congregation, and later about the newly created Federation of The Sisters of Mercy of St. Charles Borromeo, and also what was happening in the whole Church. She put a lot of effort into the formation of all the sisters in the spirit of the Vatican II:

»Our common task "to be one in God" can only be achieved through the cooperation of each one of us. We beg you to do this, dear Sisters. We must not miss the voice that tells us how the Vatican Council understands the concept of service as it is communicated to us in its documents.

We are all servants! Not even the Church wants to rule anymore, but to serve. This has been a wonderful change from earlier pre-conciliar thinking. The awareness that "I am a servant" should penetrate each of you to the core. Without you, dear fellow Sisters, we cannot manage to fulfil the tasks set before us.

The Church requires us to bring into our lives a new spirit, the spirit of the Council. After all, it is a spirit of true love and mutual trust, a spirit of sincerity and truth, a spirit of poverty, simplicity, and humility. First of all, we have to disentangle ourselves from formality and super-

ficility. It is necessary to go deep and to the heart of the matter. It is not enough only to read and to know a religious decree: it is also necessary to live it.

May the Virgin Mary, humble servant of God on earth and glorious Queen of Heaven, protect us and bless us so that according to her example we may glorify God in love, humility and enduring service.« (From the first letter to the Sisters, 1st 1970 Znojmo-Hradiště).

Mother Vojtěcha was aware of the great task before her as Mother General of a large congregation whilst putting into practice the renewal required by Vatican II. She sought to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this. On the threshold of 1971 she wrote to the Sisters: **»Dear Sisters, again this year we have the same great task before us – renewal according to Vatican II. The uncompromising duty of each one of us is to deepen our spiritual lives. ...Dear Sisters, may we not disappoint the expectations not only of Heaven, but also of Earth.**«

The first fruit of post-conciliar renewal for the Congregation was the writing of a new Constitution. In gratitude for the work of all the Sisters gathered for the Chapter meeting, Mother Vojtěcha said: **»A great task has been fulfilled: we now have a textbook for holiness. However, a far more difficult task awaits us: to make our whole lives a school of holiness.**«

She tried to inspire the Sisters by the example of her own life, as well as by using her skill as a teacher to explain terms not commonly used until after the Council such as 'charism' and 'spirituality'. Together with the Sisters, she explored and expressed the full content of their Congregation's charism and spirituality. She could not publish her thoughts publicly, as this was not allowed by the regime. She chose instead the only possible way to communicate regularly with all the Sisters in writing. This was through samizdat, (a primitive form of copying printed material). This form of communication was illegal and she again risked imprisonment. Mother Vojtěcha presented Vatican II's doctrine on religious life to the Congregation in a way that the

Sisters could understand the heart, beauty and fullness of religious life lived in the Church and for the Church. She urged the Sisters to cooperate because she knew that otherwise the real renewal of the Congregation could not be achieved.

In her personal meetings with individual sisters she passed on her own passion for renewal. But she also had to deal with the sisters' temptation to relax after all the innovations now that everything was nice and clear, and stated in their new constitution.

Regarding her understanding of Church teaching she sought help from priests who were experts in this field. Her options were limited. During her time as Mother General she had deep friendships with two priests in particular: a Franciscan, P. Jan Evangelista Urban, and a Capuchin, P. Jan Evangelista Vicha.

The political situation in the country severely limited contact with other countries, and therefore with our Sisters from abroad. The Vatican Council invited the Superiors of Orders and Congregations to work together by setting up "Conferences of Superiors". These were held in the free world, though they could not work officially in communist countries. Mother Vojtěcha chose to cooperate secretly.

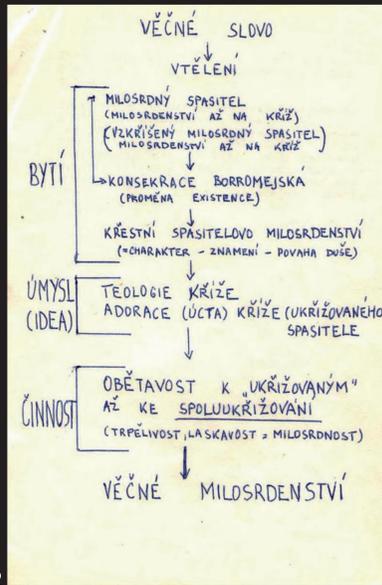
The important milestone in the life of the Congregation of St. Charles Borromeo was the founding of the Federation in Rome on **11th October 1970**. This Federation was made up of the seven Congregations that originated from the Mother House in Nancy, France. Mother Vojtěcha participated in writing the Constitution and the basic rules for the Federation SCB. It involved a lot of effort as this was the first time that the Superiors of all the Congregations met to work together. The Holy See approved the Federation of The Mercy Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo on **15th March 1974**.

1976-1988

RE-ELECTED MOTHER GENERAL FOR TWO MORE TERMS



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1. Audience with Holy Father John Paul II (1979).
2. Notes for teaching the Sisters
3. Chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows in Znojmo-Hradiště
4. Mother Vojtěcha walking in the garden, Znojmo-Hradiště
5. Mother Vojtěcha with some of the Sisters (1983)
6. Mother Vojtěch in civil dress visiting illegally formed young Sisters



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On 2nd July 1976, at the VIII General Chapter meeting, Mother Vojtěcha was re-elected as Mother General for the next six years.

On 12th March 1980 the new Constitution was approved by the Vatican and on 15th April 1980 Mother Vojtěcha circulated it to the Sisters as 'illegal' samizdat copies. In the accompanying letter she encourages the Sisters to embrace it wholeheartedly, because it makes clear the path for their particular vocation. *»The confirmation of our Constitution by the Church is the challenge for us to set off, with determination, on a journey of "perfect love", because it is the guarantee that we will walk quickly, safely and with confidence in working for the renewal of religious life. Therefore we must do our best, dear Sisters, to know the new constitution, to understand it, to fulfil it and live it with love, in spirit and truth, and in so doing, meet the Triune God and respond to his gift.«*

On 17th July 1978 at the conclusion of VIIIth General Chapter in Znojmo-Hradiště she wrote an encouraging letter to the delegates: *»Thank you for everything! A great and difficult task has been accomplished. However, our efforts for charismatic renewal can't stop here! We are now faced with hugely important challenges. The real work begins now. We need to put all our hearts into the practice of the guidelines as set out by the Vatican II and the VIII General Chapter. What happens next will determine whether our congregation will take off on the wings of His merciful love and so make Christ visible, or nothing will change. It depends on each individual Sister. Dear Sister-Delegates, I believe in your desire to move forward. I believe that in your zeal you will develop an apostolate that will set others on fire, an apostolate of perfect*

love, so that each Sister in the Congregation is led by the Holy Spirit and responds fully to our most merciful God. I have great hope in you.«

On 3rd July 1982 at the start of IX General Chapter, she said amongst other things: *»This is an important time. We must not fail. What matters are the souls. What matters is the whole world.«*

On 12th July 1982 she was elected Mother General for the third time, so had to have the approval of the Holy See.

From the very start of her time as Mother General she worked for the renewal of the Congregation. She received new girls into the Congregation, who longed to live the consecrated life, despite the great risk posed by going against the Communist regime. In this way she formed about 50 'secret sisters'. In that time she was not only the spiritual mother of her own Congregation, but also of sisters from other congregations, and to many priests, seminarians and laymen. Despite her duties she always had time to receive people and to listen. From 1st May 1984 the IX General Chapter met again. At the end of this session she wrote a summary report for the Sister-Delegates and Superiors: *»From the beginning of the IX General Assembly through all five working sessions we have been accompanied by the evangelical motto: "Put out into the deep!" Lk 5:4 ...*

The programme of the IX General Assembly was focused on the most important part of our religious calling: on transformation from within, on going deeper, and on living an authentic life...What matters is not that we constantly chose novelties, but that everything we do we do it better in a spirit of renewal.«

She encouraged the sisters and expressed her gratitude to them for the work accomplished: *»Go, dear Sisters, and set the world on fire with love and mercy! May our torches burn brightly!«* (Znojmo-Hradiště, 1st May 1984).

On 15th November 1985 Mother Vojtěcha wrote, jointly with other Superiors, a letter addressed to Lubomír Štrougal, the Prime Minister of the Federal Government, regarding permission to receive novices. As they had no reply after a year, she wrote another letter dated 12th January 1987 to push for a response.

In another setting, she pushed for the same issues. On 27th May 1987, at a meeting of the Central Council of the Czech Catholic Charity in Znojmo-Hradiště, (an organisation that collaborated with the Communist Party), with her customary bravery she again spoke out about permission to receive novices.

On 16th July 1987 she initiated and wrote a joint letter with other Superiors in Czechoslovakia, to Dr. Gusáv Husák, the President of the Republic, asking for permission to receive novices. The letter was signed by the Superiors of 26 religious orders, even though at this time the 'Conference of Superiors' in our country had not yet been established. Mother Vojtěcha's signature was first on the list.

1987–1988

ILLNESS AND THE LAST DAYS OF HER LIFE



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1. Mother Vojtěcha in her last years
2. Mother Vojtěcha during a theatre performances by the Sisters in the Jubilee celebration of the Congregation shortly before her death
3. Mother Vojtěcha at the end of the performance
4. The last photo of Mother Vojtěcha, November 1987
5. Her funeral Mass
6. The funeral procession of priests to the cemetery
7. The funeral procession behind the coffin, led by the Congregation's General Council (from left Sister Ludmila, Iviolata and Fabiola)
8. At the tomb of Mother Vojtěcha (1999).



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In the autumn of 1987 the first symptoms of her illness appeared – fatigue, cough and chest pains. The diagnosis of lung cancer was confirmed on **3rd November 1987**. Mother Vojtěcha accepted this diagnosis with fortitude. She replied to a note of encouragement from her spiritual director, Fr. Jan Evangelista Urban: *»I am doing better. I have to take a lot of medication and am forced to live a comfortable life!«*

Mother Vojtěcha wrote more farewell letters, in which she spoke of her destiny and the closeness of her death with peace and a deep faith in eternal life. In a letter to her niece she wrote:

*»My dear Sr. Leona,
May the peace and love of God be with you. I'm writing to you, dearest Sister, to comfort you and to ask you for prayer. Afterwards, I will intercede for you very, very much because I long for you to be holy. I know it costs a lot but it is worth it! Be grateful for each day of your life, dear Sister. However, that's not enough. Be grateful for all the little things that go wrong, for all the pains and crosses as well. These are all greetings from Heaven, but most commonly delivered by those around us. And this confuses us so that we don't know how to receive these greetings with open arms. There will be a time when we will wish we could offer flowers of our love to the Lord, but it will be too late.*

Dear Sister, be selfish in this respect: be a selfish saint and draw benefits from everything for your own soul, so that you have something to give to others. Let's appreciate the present moments. Let's grasp them and transform them into flowers expressing our love for God through the hands of the Virgin Mary.

Work on your soul, faithfully and honestly. Do not flag in zeal! Believe me, in old age one wilts, and has no more strength or vitality. One continues doing what one has always done. I see it around me here. How beautiful old people can be even in their infirmity. Leonka, you too be beautiful in your soul. As we get older we should be adorned by nobility of soul, goodness of heart, and a deep love of God and our neighbour, especially our

fellow Sisters. This is what I wish for you. This is what I pray for you now, and will do. Your auntie, Sr. M. Vojtěcha, brings you into the heart of Jesus and daily meets you there.«
(Undated)

To her sister Emilie she wrote:

*»My dear, dearest sister Emilie,
May the Peace and love of God be with you always! Do not cry that I depart this life. After all, I am going home. I just ask you to help me to be with our loved ones quickly. I look forward to being with them and with my heavenly protectors. I believe that they will come to welcome me. I look forward to being with you in heaven as well, but I also wish for you to be here on earth a very long time, living in holiness and in the love of God.*

Dear sister, God is worth everything we bear for Him. Love Him, suffer for him, be glad to carry whatever difficulties and pains that God's love for you sends. At the end of day, we can offer all these things as bouquet of love to him, and what beauty and happiness it produces in your soul and in your heart. Not only that, but there is always someone we can offer it up for. Never forget me. Forgive me, please, if I have hurt you in any way. And even if I did, I loved you very much. I know I had to go my own way, and sometimes I hurt those I loved most.

I will recompense you for it from Heaven. Sister, how I desire for us to be holy! Live faithfully according to the Rule of our Order, be committed to your Superiors. Love them. In this you will be blessed. This is what I pray for you. Your thankful sister, Sr. M. Vojtěcha.

I would like to write to everyone, but I don't know if I can manage it. I know that I don't have much time left.

But I am looking forward to being with the Lord God. Forgive me that I kept it secret (the illness). I did so out of love!«

(4th November 1987)

She also wrote to her former fellow prisoners and classmates. In a letter to Míla Patová she writes that she admires Míla's surrender to the will of God. She

also tells her friend about her illness, and expresses her desire to reach her goal, heaven:

»I am worse now: after my pneumonia didn't get better, they treated me for TB, but later discovered that I have lung cancer. I fully give myself to the Lord and I receive from His hands everything that He sends, and I look forward to Heaven. After all, this is our goal. And so, my dear, dear Míla, give my greetings to all the girls, and tell them that I pray for them.«

To her friend Libuše Bulínová she writes:

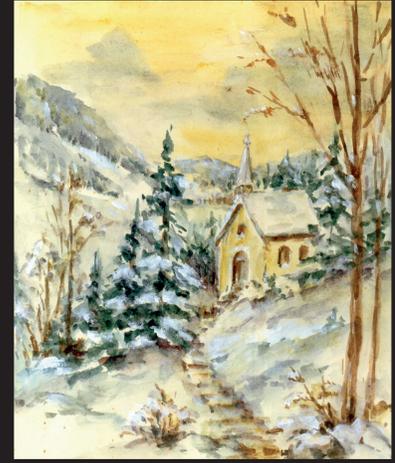
»My radiotherapy ends on Friday 11th December, and then we will see. I am fully given to the will of God, and I feel that I am under the protection of Mary. One day she will take me across to the other shore. I am not afraid. If she is with me, all will be well. May the will of God be done in everything. So I must continue here to intercede for God to greatly bless the Congregation.

To you, my dear, and to the other girls who know me, I send greetings for a wonderful and joyous Christmas. May God's love accompany them in every step and in every situation. Sr. M. Voj. «
(4th November 1987, to Libuše Bulínová, a friend from prison)

The last month here on earth, she suffered greatly and died peacefully among her Sisters on **21st January 1988**. On her deathbed she ended her life with the words that best expressed how she had lived: *»Yes, Lord.«*

One hundred and twenty priests, some of whom had been secretly consecrated, and about five hundred believers attended the funeral of Sister Vojtěcha on **28th January 1988**. Her body was laid to rest in the cemetery of the Sisters in Znojmo-Hradiště, where she still remains. She held the office of Mother General for seventeen years and seven months.

SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT OF MOTHER VOJTĚCHA



Oil paintings by Mother Vojtěcha: spring, summer, autumn, winter.

Preparing for the funeral, Mother Vojtěcha's spiritual testament was found, which she wrote on the feast of St. Charles Borromeo, 4th November 1987.

»My dear Congregation,
My dearest, beloved Sisters, through this farewell message, although I can't be with you in body, I can at least be with you in spirit.
First of all, "My soul magnifies the Lord..." for all His graces, but most of all for the grace of His calling on my life, and also for His mercy. I want to sing of His mercy forever.

And now I send heartfelt thanks to the Congregation: For accepting me as one of its members, me as a thirteen year old child; for tolerating all my mistakes, imperfections and sins; for lovingly giving me spiritual and material good; for being my support, strength and comfort.

I'm taking my leave of you, my dear Sisters, with love. You have always been my first concern, but also my love and consolation, my help and support. I take away with me my gratitude to you all! There I will pray for you, bless and protect you more than I was able to do here. Please help me to be in the glory of my Lord and Bridegroom soon.

My dear Sisters, I also appeal to you with the prayer of a mother, who is saying farewell, and expressing her last wishes, her testament: love one another! May both the commandments of love be your rule of life: love God, love one another, love your neighbour, and above all, the poor! The greater misery you see, the greater your love and tenderness should be. May merciful love conquer all. The Mercy Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo belong where there is the greatest misery! Take your example from our Mothers, our patrons!

Preserve and deepen the spirituality of our Congregation. May love, humility, simplicity and innocence, courage and honesty, true family life, and the other beautiful virtues of the Mercy Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo grace your hearts. But above all, love! Deep, strong, selfless! Love that goes to the roots of a human being and penetrates everything. For love is God in us!

May the Holy Spirit daily send streams of light! May He lead the heart of each of you and the whole Congregation. In his glory, God willing, I will pray that you safely reach the goal. However, he didn't promise an easy ride, but a safe return as long as we remain with Him.

And may our Heavenly Mother spread her mantle over you. I will pass on your greetings to her, and ask her not leave you, but that she would intercede for light, strength, courage, wisdom for you all. I will tell her how we love Her! My dear fellow Sisters, serve the Lord with joy and integrity, with faithfulness and devotion, whatever the circumstances!

The yearning for holiness and merciful love, these are our wings to heaven! This is the aim of our Rule. If we are faithful to our constitution, believe me, my dear ones, that the Congregation will grow stronger and increase. On the other hand, lukewarmness and mediocrity will bring an end to it.

My dear children who are in formation, I bless you especially. I desire that you become true, heroic and courageous Mercy Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo. However, be humble. This is the root from which all the virtues grow. The world wonders at you, but it also admires you. Do not disappoint the expectations of Heaven and Earth! So many people wait for your mercy to rescue and help them. You gave God your "yes". Live up to it. Persevere in love and sacrifice. God is worth it. I embrace and bless you!

All of heaven led by Our Mother, the Glorious Queen of Heaven, together with the patrons of our congregation and with our guardian angels, will help me to thank God for the grace of vocation, for you, and for your faithfulness and love.

Forgive me, please, if I have ever grieved, offended or disappointed you. May the rays of God's love recompense you and delight your soul and heart!

Thank you all! I thank especially the members of the General Council. It was good to work with you. May the light of Holy Spirit and the intercession of the Virgin Mary be with you! I thank all the

Superiors and plead with them to overcome through love. May they keep their spiritual life as the first priority; may they make sure the Constitution is lived out; may the spirituality and the charism of merciful love be lived out in all the communities.

I thank each of you individually, dear fellow Sisters! May the Lord be with you. May the love of God accompany you. May the Holy Spirit lead you in the path of light and renewal so that you don't get lost! I embrace you. I say goodbye. I beg for your intercession and look forward to seeing you! May the almighty and merciful God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you! Amen!
Yours, Sr. M. Vojtěcha«

Fr. Benedikt Holota, OFM, wrote to her at Christmas, during her illness:

»Br. Benedict sends you greetings, peace, and wishes you deep spiritual joy of God's love. Mother Vojtěcha, I am convinced that your illness is not about you personally, but concerns your Congregation, that it is an "occupational hazard" which has some mystical significance for the future.«

SPIRITUAL PROFILE AND THE PROCESS OF CANONIZATION



Photos that symbolise the charism and spirituality of the Sisters of Mercy of St Charles Borromeo: Jesus Crucified, the source of Mercy



Eucharist.



St. Charles Borromeo, the pattern of Mercy.



Holy Family, the model of family life in Community. (Wood carving from Mother Vojtěcha's room)

Thanks to the good religious formation, both natural and spiritual, Mother Vojtecha received, she was able to take on the difficult challenges she was faced with, whether a testing time in prison, or accepting the task of being Mother General, or dealing with terminal illness. Her love for God was purified through interior prayer, liturgy, Eucharistic adoration, and contemplation of our Crucified Lord. She led the Congregation, which had been entrusted to her through the time of post-conciliar renewal, in unity with the Church and with dedicated passion following the example of St. Charles Borromeo. She recognized the great need to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit in aligning her life and the life of the Community to the requirements of Vatican II. In difficulties she did not lack humility, wisdom, modesty, hope and a joyful spirit. She was especially courageous in giving her all for the faith and in accepting novices even under threat of imprisonment.

She always sought help from God for herself and her sisters through daily adoration especially during her time as Mother General.

»Every day I remember you before the Lord in my 'audience' with Him at the tabernacle, and trust firmly that behind every cloud you will find God's love shining to bring new light into your life...« (11th August 1988).

»The Congregation is in great need of Sisters to be in love with the Eucharist! This is what matters most. Only in the Eucharist do we have the certainty of God's closeness to us that is so breathtakingly beautiful and real. Remain always in His light, carry His Light, be a ray of His light.« (20th April 1978)

She was sensitive to the needs and pain of others, especially of her sisters, relatives and friends. Her love was experienced by all. She was a spiritual director to many people whether in person or through correspondence. She taught her Sisters to live a life of mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation. **»We must understand mercy as love, a love which is generous and gracious, which not only invites a neighbour and receives him or her into the community, but seeks him out and draws him to come.«** (December 1977)

For Mother Vojtěcha the climax of merciful love was care for the dying: **»Through the instinct of our love we need to sense where the greatest pain is, where the wound hurts most. May the**

dying always receive mercy that is wholehearted and tender. Let us stay with a dying person as they pass away, no matter how long it takes, and return to him again and again with prayer in our hearts, saying a quiet word of faith and love to him, and doing little things for him even if we think that the patient can no longer perceive them... Let us surround him with quietness, delicacy and gentleness, and with the strength of our faith and love! Here we achieve the height of mercy.« (Samizdat Pochodeň I, p. 32, 1978)

Mother Vojtěcha had a great love for the Divine Office of the Church. She never tired of seeking out up-to-date translations of texts for the Divine Office. She encouraged Fr. Jan Barta, OFM, to translate liturgical texts into Czech. She poured her enthusiasm into the hearts of her sisters when teaching them the new structure of the Office brought in after Vatican II. She asked Fr. Dr. Stanislav Spurk to write a commentary on the individual Psalms. She then shared this enrichment of liturgy with other congregations.

It was close to her heart to encourage new vocations and she did not hesitate to risk another prison sentence. She opened the way for many young girls to enter the Congregation and she showed great courage and creative inventiveness in her love for them.

After the death of Mother Vojtěcha Sister Vicary Inviolata Krupková asked the Sisters from the Congregation to write their memories about her. About 440 letters and postcards, which related to the life and personality of Mother Vojtěcha in various ways, were gathered within 20 years. Most of the correspondents expressed their gratitude for the biography of Mother Vojtěcha, entitled "Love does not end with death". Her life spoke to them and encouraged their life of faith. Many people remembered stories about her from her schooldays. Others mention her help in difficult situations in their life or in the lives of other people, for whom they prayed for her intercession. Still others wrote asking for more copies of the prayer for Mother Vojtěcha's intercession. Some also wrote to say that their prayers were answered through her intercession and there is growing interest in asking for her help.

Process of Canonization

Permission (Nihil Obstat ex parte Sanctae Sedis) by the Vatican to start the diocesan process was delivered to the Bishop in Brno on 28th February 1996. Mons. ThLic. Vojtěch Cikrle, the Bishop of Brno inaugurated the diocesan process on 26th

November 1996. It was finished on 26th October 2004 in Brno. All the documentation of the process was delivered to Rome on 28th October and handed over to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Mons. Josef Laštovica was appointed as the Postulator for the Roman process. The Congregation for the Causes of Saints approved the diocesan process on 3rd February 2006.

Further work on the life, virtues and death of Servant of God Mother Vojtěcha Hasmandová continued in Rome. The Positio (the summary of all the necessary information about the life of Mother Vojtěcha) for the final evaluation by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints was given on 4th November 2009.

At present, the healing of a little girl through the intercession of Mother Vojtěcha is being investigated.

Prayer for the intercession of Mother Vojtěcha

*Almighty and eternal God,
Safe haven for the suffering,
We invoke Your merciful love,
And ask that you look upon (name of sick person).
At the intercession of our Mother Vojtěcha
We ask that you restore his/her health
So that he/she may again praise and serve you.
For you live and reign forever and ever. Amen.*

Requests for more information and reports on answered prayers can be sent to this address:
Postulation of Mother Vojtěcha Hasmandová
Šporkova 12, 118 Prague 1
Via Concordia, 1, 00 183 Rome, Italy
E-mail: postulaceMV@boromejky.cz

Financial contributions towards the ongoing process of Mother Vojtěcha Hasmandová can be sent to account no: 27-2072820437/0100 Komerční banka (Commercial Bank), Kaiserštejnský Palace, Lesser Quarter sq. 37/23, Prague 1, Variable symbol: 1988th

Thank you for your gift. May God bless you.